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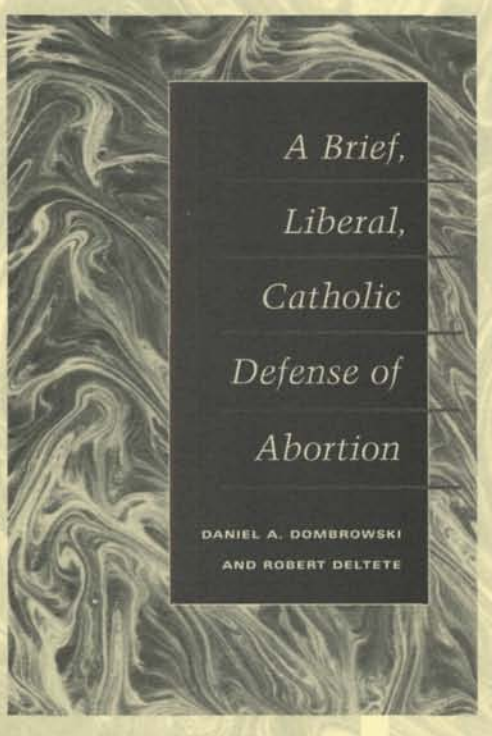

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Life is our dictionary.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

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There Is a Season

I am proud to announce the appointment of three new and distinguished columnists. While Philonoë will continue to write "At Large and At Small" in our Winter issues, the proprietorship of each year's Spring, Summer, and Autumn columns will pass, respectively, to Thomas Mallon, Francine du Plessix Gray, and Nicholson Baker. We chose this trio by asking ourselves an audaciously selfish question: "Which essayists do *we* most want to read?"

You will hear more about Gray and Baker as their seasons roll around. Thomas Mallon is the author of the historical novels *Henry and Clara, Dewey Defeats Truman,* and, most recently, *Two Moons,* a tale set in the 1870s that combines (I suspect for the first time) the subjects of Mars, malaria, love, and trigonometry. He wrote his first column, "On Not Being a Poet," in a breathless interstice between two halves of a book tour. "I could never have written a chapter of a novel amid such commotion," he says. "With an essay, that associative genre, you *ought* to commute back and forth between your writing and your life." It was Mary McCarthy's essays, read at age nineteen, that led Mallon to become a writer. "But my heart," he says, "is in the nineteenth century, when the genres of essay and novel, which have drifted apart, were much closer together."

A time to get, and a time to lose. Early this year the Scholar and the world lost Jervis Anderson, the author of this issue's lead essay, "England in Jamaica." We are indebted to Hendrik Hertzberg, Anderson's editor at *The New Yorker,* who helped us prepare this elegant memoir for publication. "Independence, integrity, and intellectual kindness were Jervis's shining virtues," recalls Hertzberg. "He was impervious to intellectual and political fashion. He had sympathetic imagination. He could write about people like Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver with insight because he was capable of imagining himself in their shoes without tempering the sharpness of his critique. His memorial service was like the Peaceable Kingdom, with Norman Podhoretz, Barbara Garson, Stanley Crouch, and Paul Berman all in the same room not yelling at each other."

"England in Jamaica" was the start of an autobiography Anderson did not live to finish. "It was of enormous importance to Jervis," says Hertzberg, "and it's heartbreaking that we'll never read the rest of it."

A. F.

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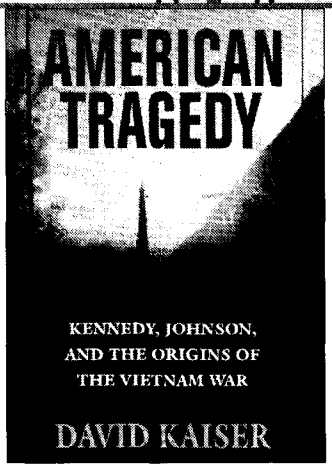

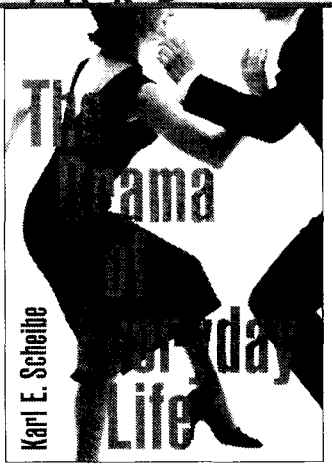

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

On Not Being a Poet

THOMAS MALLON

Last year a novelist friend of mine mentioned that he'd soon be coming to New York to recite a poem of his choosing at a Town Hall program marking National Poetry Month.

"I'll give you a hundred dollars if you do 'The Highwayman,'" I responded. A joke, of course, and probably unintelligible to anyone much younger than ourselves. Surely today's students don't have to memorize these sonorous lines by Alfred Noyes, which even now the two of us can recall:

> The wind was a torrent of darkness among
> the gusty trees,
> The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed
> upon cloudy seas,
> The road was a ribbon of moonlight over
> the purple moor,
> And the highwayman came riding—
> Riding—riding—
> The highwayman came riding, up to the
> old inn-door.

The "ribbon of moonlight"—like Bess, "the landlord's black-eyed daughter"—has stayed with me for forty years now, since grade school, but the success of my joke depended on my friend's knowing, as do I, thanks to all our learning and supposed sophistication, that "The Highwayman" is a *bad* poem, a chestnut, the sort of thing not so much imparted to yesterday's schoolchildren as inflicted upon them.

Like most jokes, mine had an undercurrent of hostility—one directed, I realize, toward poetry itself. Why does it get its own month? Perhaps it needs one, being such a weak-sister genre that almost no one will read it unless force-marched into celebrating it. Even some of the best poets will concede that the art is kept alive partly by artificial means. In "The Trouble with Poetry," Charles Simic quickly warms to his own indictment:

> No one in their right mind ever reads poetry. Even among the literary theorists nowadays, it is fashionable to feel superior to all literature and especially poetry. That some people still continue to write it is an oddity that belongs in some "Believe It or Not" column of the daily newspaper. . . . Parents still prefer their children to be taxidermists and tax collectors rather than poets. Who can blame them? Would you want your only daughter to be a poet or a hostess in a sleazy nightclub? That's a tough one.

And yet, for all that, poetry remains the most privileged of literary genres, a gated community at the top of Parnassus, whose lower hills are covered with prose's down-market suburban sprawl. Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators of the world" (a dubious compliment, if you think about it) are typically much more certain of their standing than Simic is. In *How to Read a Poem And Fall in Love with Poetry*, Edward Hirsch declares himself "convinced the kind of experience—the kind of knowledge—one gets from poetry cannot be duplicated elsewhere. The spiritual life wants articulation—it wants embodiment in language." At which point the prose writer may be inclined to raise his hand in the back of the auditorium and identify himself as a fellow practitioner of "language." But it will not do him much good to claim first-class citizenship in the realm of articulation. In an essay titled "Can Poetry Matter?" Dana Gioia identifies the genre as the best and the brightest: "Poetry is the art of using words charged with their utmost meaning." Poetic coinage is nontransferrable. That prose paraphrase can actually make some

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Thomas Mallon's most recent novel is *Two Moons* (Pantheon).

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modern-verse opacities more lucent (Hugh Kenner on portions of Ezra Pound) is a fact the poetry world resists as ardently as the prose world clings to the truism that the movies can only ruin a book.

Gioia's statement is a modernization of Coleridge's famous hierarchical distinction: "prose=words in their best order; poetry=the best words in their best order." Poets have cited his contrasting definitions with smiling self-assurance for nearly two centuries, despite Coleridge's tendency to find other writers' prose so good he wouldn't think of changing a word of it before publishing it as his own, and despite his bifurcation's manifest lack of logic: the prose writer's diction decisions are often *more* exacting than the poet's, given good prose's premium on exactitude, a standard from which poetry is permitted to stray whenever its sound gets in the mood to trump, rather than echo, sense.

When it comes to what each genre might teach the other, poets typically feel they're looking down a one-way street. Joseph Brodsky can barely manage to be polite about the matter:

> What does a writer of prose learn from poetry? The dependence of a word's specific gravity on context, focused thinking, omission of the self-evident, the dangers that lurk within an elevated state of mind. And what does the poet learn from prose? Not much: attention to detail, the use of common parlance and bureaucratese, and, in rare instances, compositional know-how (the best teacher of which is music).

If we hear that someone is "writing a novel" in her spare time, we're likely to think her a casual adventurer, someone taking a long shot on a flashy, rather commonplace dream of literary glory. If we hear that someone is writing poetry when he gets home from the office, we nod appreciatively, our lower lips pushing forward in a how-about-that way, as we acknowledge the monastic seriousness this must entail. It's no wonder Molière's *bourgeois gentilhomme* had to be told that he was speaking prose. We barely bother to define this mode of writing by anything other than its handicaps and lacks. My *Columbia Encyclopedia* treats it like the plain stepsister patted on her head for the skill with which she does chores:

> meaningful and grammatical written or spoken language that does not utilize the metrical structure, word transposition, or rhyme characteristic of poetry or verse; it is, however, raised above the level of lifeless composition or commonplace conversation by the use of balance, rhythm, repetition, and antithesis.

You can dress it up, but why take it out when you could have a sonnet on your arm?

Alfred Harbage assures readers of *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* that the Bard moves between poetry and prose according to his own rules, but he won't deny how, in *The Merchant of Venice*, "the most common use for prose was in realistic and common scenes or parts of scenes, just as the most common use of blank verse was in romantic and serious ones." When commentators point out that Hamlet's "What a piece of work is a man!" speech is prose, the observation tends to be made with a slightly awed condescension, like the report of a Special Olympics feat. And it cannot cheer the prose writer to check the statistics and find that, by far, Shakespeare's highest per-play percentage of prose, 86.6 percent, occurs in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

In our own time, reviews of novels and biographies pay remarkably little attention to how these books are actually *written*, line by line. Character, plot, and theme gobble up the reviewer's attention, as if all these elements weren't dependent on the DNA in the writer's *écriture*. A perusal of M. H. Abrams's venerable *Glossary of Literary Terms* reveals what an impoverished critical vocabulary we possess for discussions of prose style. Prose is so prosaic it's not even entitled to the term *prosody*—that's poetry's word for its own jewel box of tricks and techniques.

One of the few terms prose can call its own is *periodic sentence*, whose glory is barely suggested by Abrams's definition of it as a sentence "in which the parts, or 'members,' are so composed that the sense remains suspended until the close." Only examples will do this golden staple—the blank verse of prose—real justice. Take this one from *Tristram Shandy:* "Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world, though the cant of hypocrites may be the worst, the cant of criticism is the most tormenting!" Or, from my old *Practical English*

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Handbook, this one of Thoreau's: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison."

The success of a periodic sentence usually depends on what the position of the word "is" is—the later the better. But the form can hide almost any verb under ever more layers, withholding it like the ultimate romantic favor. Norman Mailer, in *Of a Fire on the Moon,* serves up a long, deliberately overwhelming list of the Apollo 11 spacecraft's switches, buttons, and controls, a Homeric catalogue of items in a single ship; but if the author has borrowed this kind of inventory from classical poetry, he follows it, after an em dash, with a fabulous splashdown of the purest periodic prose:

> —yes this whole constellation of systems and subsystems of control over power, and control over the beaming out of thought translated into electromagnetic waves, and control even over the disposal of simple human waste sits over, above, around, beneath, yes and even behind the three astronauts in whole congeries of Twentieth Century concepts and forces which have come to focus that this effort may fly to the moon.

"Sits" and "have come" are minimal whiffs of verbal oxygen, all the reader is allowed to inhale as the sentence postpones releasing itself into meaning with the long-withheld *fly.*

I'm sure schoolchildren still recite some poetry, if not the work of Alfred Noyes. But when was the last time they diagrammed a sentence? The latter activity is a sort of emblem for extinct, parochial-school make-work. But what a grand blackboard trajectory those lines of Mailer would require!

On October 27, 1818, John Keats wrote to Richard Woodhouse about the poet's "chameleon" nature and lack of a stable ego: "A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity—he is continually in for and filling some other body. . . . I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labors should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them."

I would have to say that poets of my acquaintance have often managed to maintain fixed, solid egos. Brodsky says that the prose writer's "inferiority complex . . . doesn't automatically imply the poet's superiority complex," but I have seen a fair share of poets well aware of their property values at the top of Parnassus, and not at all shy about pointing them out to folks lower down the hill. In summertime, at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, my literary home away from home, I hear great helpings of generally excellent poetry twice a day for two weeks. It is hard not to notice how comfortably unnatural some poets look behind the lectern. Presentation, for these, is an overdone art, the way it is with restaurant food in northern California and lower Manhattan. Their declamations and murmurings don't so much paint the lily as outfit it with a Dolby sound system, which between poems shuts down for that silent, please-hold-your-applause moment, when appreciative sighs in the back of the theater will resound like bravas. Last year, in an extreme moment, one young versifier in leather pants came out from behind the lectern to recite his work from memory, with a style of vocal emphasis that can only be compared to the devouring facial expressions of silent film. Between poems, deliberately exhausted from his effort, he gulped water from a plastic bottle, as if it were a medieval jug of mead set out as the troubadour's reward. And when he was through, he left—too wrung out to stay for the much-better-known prose writer who followed him.

Yes, an extreme example, but the absence of the poet's identity seems to me a myth still in need of exploding—even if it means debunking a point from Keats, the first poet I was ever mad for. And yet even here, as I look back on my freshman-year infatuation, I realize that it was those *letters* of his, like the one to Woodhouse—those bouncy, yearning missives about "Soul-making" and the admirable energies of a quarrel in the streets—that held me more than the poems. The truth is I had a crush on Keats himself: we both lacked money and height, but were immensely excited about literature. He, so full of juice and confidence in a way I wasn't, would still somehow have understood me.

But I would have preferred him to send me letters, not verses. In fact, my deepest engagement with poets, then and now, has usually

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involved their prose. For my doctoral dissertation, I read deeply in the poets of the Great War. Why was I drawn to them? In part, I think, from the way their most startling effects depended on the unexpected use of prose within their poems. Look at the last lines of Siegfried Sassoon's "'Blighters'":

> I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
> Lurching to ragtime tunes, or "Home,
> sweet Home,"—
> And there'd be no more jokes in Music-
> halls
> To mock the riddled corpses round
> Bapaume.

The rhyme and meter are there, but all poetic diction and syntactical oddities have been blasted away by a colloquial directness straight out of prose. Even Wilfred Owen, madder for Keats than I ever was, could supplement his poetic mastery of assonance and alliteration ("the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle") with startling outbursts of prose ("Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!"). The war *required* prose (even Brodsky concedes that certain narrative and historical subjects need it), and nothing in the work of my dissertation subject, the poet Edmund Blunden (1896–1974), affected me like the last lines of his prose memoir, *Undertones of War*:

> Could any countryside be more sweetly at rest, more alluring to naiad and hamadryad, more incapable of dreaming a field-gun? Fortunate it was that at the moment I was filled with this simple joy. I might have known the war by this time, but I was still too young to know its depth of ironic cruelty. No conjecture that, in a few weeks, Buire-sur-Ancre would appear much the same as the cataclysmal railway cutting by Hill 60, came from that innocent greenwood. No destined anguish lifted its snaky head to poison a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat.

This is lyrical, to be sure—those poetic bird names and the inverted "Fortunate it was"—but the passage also has the direct and *confidential* quality of a letter or diary entry, something every poem sacrifices by putting on its formal raiments.

I never lisped in numbers, and it's hard to say whether my failure to become a poet derived more from temperament or from manifest lack of talent. Even so, there came a moment in my early twenties when I—being serious about literature—not so much aspired to poetry as felt obligated to write it.

The thirty or so poems that resulted still slumber in a little folder in my New York apartment. From an effort (exactly the right word) called "Orbitals," let me quote the minimum number of lines required to make my point:

> I shifted locus a little last night:
> I moved into a blue room with a view.
> The new vantage spies all the clocks and
> bells
> To the north, instead of the south-
> southwest.
> The droplet of bright that hailed a delight
> Seems closer, but no longer looks green.

This halting iambic pentameter recounts my move into a house on Well Street, in Providence, Rhode Island, for the last semester of my senior year at Brown University. The "blue room with a view"—my attempt at *both* assonance and literary allusion—sat farther down College Hill from Brown, and I know that the "droplet of bright" refers to the illuminated top of the old Industrial National Bank building. But "hailed a delight"? What had gone on under that light? Something romantic? Believe me, I'd remember. I cannot now imagine what it was, and the poem exasperates me, because having reread this far, I would like to recall whatever the delight was. My twenty-one-year-old poetic self is so intent on being cryptic, so aware that poetry should be *elusive* as well as allusive, that it won't supply the necessary information. "Orbitals" is a self-conscious attempt at *expression*; what it could now use—what I've tried to achieve in a quarter century of writing prose—is a little *communication* with the reader.

In my post-versifying, and eventually post-academic, life, I have never been able to think of myself as an artist. I didn't even know that this was an "issue" until a therapist assured me it was. Proud of my ability to earn a living by my pen, I have always preferred to regard myself as a "working writer," a sort of small businessman who took on the most inviting assign-

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ments that would still keep his books in the black. In fact, the folder with these college poems has been sitting for years in a box that contains mostly copies of tax returns—what's *that* juxtaposition about? A bourgeois rebuke to the pretentious young poetaster? Or a lingering artistic whimper against the "working writer"?

But the conflict that really bothers me is this one between expression and communication. It is poetry's willful conflation of ends and means—its tendency to put words above meaning—that feels most alien to the prose practitioner. Hopkins's famous prescription to Bridges that "the poetical language of an age shd. be the current language heightened . . . and unlike itself" overfulfills itself most wantonly in "The Windhover," a poem I have always loved to say and to teach, but have never fully been able to accept, with its "rolling level underneath him steady air," as English.

It is my temperament, more than any critical faculty, that makes me regard this sonnet as an extralinguistic instrument of extasis, like fasting, or forcing oneself to pirouette at great speed. Love it as I do, I always want to straighten it out, sober it up—and no doubt ruin it—by turning the "achieve" in its eighth line ("the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!") into "achievement."

The idea that poetry should instruct as well as delight did not persist much beyond Dryden. Thought and feeling, said to have been coupled by the Metaphysicals, went their separate ways in the eighteenth century. Thought ruled the Augustan roost, and then, once the Romantics arrived, feeling took over and has reigned ever since. Hazlitt, writing "On Poetry in General," actually made poetry less an art form than a synonym for feeling itself: "All that is worth remembering in life, is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness, are all poetry." In 1928, Edmund Wilson asked: "Is Verse a Dying Technique?" and bluntly made the argument against its interior preoccupations. By the time of Matthew Arnold, he asserted, "it had finally become almost impossible to handle large subjects successfully in verse."

The modern world, according to Wilson, required the ample, sloppy novel if it was to be engaged fully or indeed at all:

> Even a writer like Dostoevsky rises out of this weltering literature. You cannot say that his insight is less deep, that his vision is less noble or narrower, or that his mastery of his art is less complete than that of the great poets of the past. You can say only that what he achieves he achieves by somewhat different methods.

Anything Dostoevskian might be quite beyond me, but I did find, as I became a writer, that I wanted to reproduce the world's social patterns—small towns, families, institutions—in a series of historical novels. As I became a writer I wanted, above all, at least in fiction, *not* to be writing about myself and my feelings.

Back in the 1970s, Louis Simpson, contributing to an anthology of poets' reflections on "the creative process," explained the origins of his poem "The Hour of Feeling," which begins with the lines:

> A woman speaks:
> "I hear you were in San Francisco.
> What did they tell you about me?"

The woman trembles, and the "sheer intensity" of her feeling leaves the poem's speaker ready to perceive the world with a new clarity and intensity of his own:

> Thanks to the emotion with which she spoke
> I can see half of Manhattan,
> the canyons and the avenues.
>
> There are signs high in the air
> above Times Square and the vicinity:
> a sign for Schenley's Whiskey,
> for Admiral Television,
> and a sign saying Milltag, whatever that means.

Only in Simpson's prose explanation, written years later, do we learn that the paranoid woman of the opening lines had come to reclaim a rejected manuscript from the publishing house where he worked: "It was a peculiar piece of writing. She had invented a machine for choosing a mate. It looked like the electric

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chair. You put your prospective partner in it and the pointer swung to a number." When writing the poem, years after the experience, he "cut out the business about the manuscript. The mating machine seemed ridiculous, and I didn't want to be satiric—I was after bigger game." But what was this bigger game? Simpson says, in the same essay, that he writes poetry to "arrive finally at my true feeling about the experience."

Which is why his prose elaboration interests me more than his poem, even though I get what he's doing there and admire the power of its compressed language. Simpson's poem—like, I think, most modern poetry—remains about him and his feelings, whereas I find myself more curious about the life story of the rejected author and about the city itself—not just images of it, but the way it actually operates, its connective tissues. I would prefer a gradual understanding to a single intense emotion ("The Hour of Feeling"). I don't think I could build something as momentarily powerful as Simpson does from this experience, but I do think I could construct something fuller. I would seek to master the experience rather than to inflame it. My emotion—and, I hope, my readers'—would arise from accumulated engagements with the characters and their world, something I could not achieve by writing a poem or, I suppose, even a short story.

When I now read Keats's contemplation of his nightingale's song—

> The voice I hear this passing night was heard
> In ancient days by emperor and clown—

I'm inclined to see him as a novelist aborning. *There* is your subject, I want to say: the progression of past to present. When he writes Woodhouse at such a full poetic boil that he must guard against losing "all interest in human affairs," I want to urge him: yes, stay *here*, sublunary and connected.

My prose nature betrays itself when I hear music (I have difficulty attending to anything but melody) and when I walk (I set a fast, even pace—pedestrian in more than one sense—with no window-shopping or dilly-dallying). I am writing this sentence in longhand, the blue ink heading toward the right margin of the yellow paper in a way that satisfies both my eye and the flesh on my evenly moving right hand. It's about *getting there*, and hoping the reader wants to come along. One summer at Bread Loaf, Eddie Hirsch jokingly asked why prose writers feel compelled to write all the way across each sheet. "So that the reader will turn the page," replied the perfectly named novelist Francine Prose. In his witty *How to Read a Poem*, Hirsch declares his fondness for Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*—those visually imitative poems like "Il Pleut," whose type does a vertical drip down the page. But what about the visual seductions of prose? The proportioned arrangements of chapter division, offset quotation, subheading, footnote? These are things that appeal to me, perhaps inordinately—certainly too much to portend any breakthroughs as a visionary.

The smallness of literary fiction—both its subject matter and its professional world—worries many of those who write it. One often hears these days that the subgenre is "going the way of poetry," destined soon to be published by university presses and read chiefly by other writers of literary fiction. If the serious novel confines itself, as it often does, to the same authorial feelings as poetry, I think this fate of circumscription is likely.

The poetry world is already something of a closed circuit, partly from the obscurity of so much of its product, and partly—the inevitable flip side—from a surfeit of the "prose virtues" that Robert Pinsky recommends to it. In marked contrast to Brodsky, the current poet laureate cautions poets not to stray too far from clarity and directness, and he draws up a list of current tendencies: "Perception is more to be trusted than reflection, former ideas are obstacles, and the large blank, irreducible phenomena are the truest incarnations of reality." One knows exactly the kind of lazy, portentous verse this leads to. But there is another sort of contemporary verse that resists prose paraphrase only because the effort would be superfluous. Too much of today's poetry, despite enhancement by typographical convention on the page and artificial delivery on the platform, is already, essentially, prose. Take, from *The Norton Anthology of Modern*

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Poetry, this portion of Jim Harrison's "Fair/Boy Christian Takes a Break":

> We watch the secret air tube blow up the
> skirts of the farm girls,
> tanned to the knees then strangely white.
> We eat spareribs and pickled eggs,
> the horses tear the ground to pull a load
> of stone . . .

For all its specificity and evocation, I would characterize this as prose that has been annoyed into verse, to its own detriment. The lines' precise observations are muffled by the reader's being made continually aware, to no particular purpose and by visual form alone, that he is reading a poem. The "prose virtues" are more or less all there is here; but the piece still seems to ask for extra credit because it is, after all, a poem.

I think poetry's best hope may lie in a style proposed by Charles Simic, whose loud denunciation of the genre (partly humorous, to be sure) was quoted near the beginning of this column. In that same essay, "The Trouble with Poetry," he asks for a style that is "a carnival of styles," a poetry "that has the feel of cable television with more than three hundred channels, facts stranger than fiction, fake miracles and superstitions in supermarket tabloids." Maybe I like his rejection of attempts "to reform poetry, to make it didactic and moral," because that leaves those modes to prose writers like me. But Simic's own poems are a powerful advertisement for his prescriptions. The *realness* of his surrealism—as opposed to the rote "one-of-the-guys surrealism" that Pinsky scorns as part of today's new poetic diction—has been startling me for years. Perhaps Simic is the perfect poet for a writer like me, because he makes me appreciate what he does without making me feel any desire to emulate it.

Consider "My Quarrel with the Infinite":

> I preferred the fleeting,
> Like a memory of a sip of wine
> Of noble vintage
> On the tongue with eyes closed . . .
>
> When you tapped me on the shoulder,
> O light, unsayable in your splendor.
> A lot of good you did to me.
> You just made my insomnia last longer.
> I sat rapt at the spectacle,
> Secretly ruing the fugitive:
> All its provisory, short-lived
> Kisses and enchantments.
>
> Here with the new day breaking,
> And a single scarecrow on the horizon
> Directing the traffic
> Of crows and their shadows.

Simic starts with an expressed preference for quiet, prosy contentment, but when the light comes, he has to open his eyes to the ominous sights it makes possible. The light itself may be "unsayable," but what it brings are this poet's characteristic visions. It *does* do him "A lot of good."

Looking at this, I think that Brodsky may be right about how "the dangers that lurk within an elevated state of mind" are something prose writers learn only by venturing into poetry. And perhaps what I keep calling my different temperament is really just a failure of nerve. Would I have been a better poet, or a poet at all, if I had been a braver person?

At this point (to take one more term from poetic technique's vast vocabulary), you may ask: Is he about to compose a palinode? Is he going to construct a closing passage that overthrows all he's argued above?

The answer, I'm afraid, is no. I can see myself finding my unmetrical feet in five more tentative lines from "Orbitals," that poem about my move halfway down College Hill in 1973:

> The glass and plastic game-board figurines,
> The tiny box houses, towers and lights,
> Were playfully flung—they landed upright.
> Their pegs found new perfect holes in the
> baize.
> I moved down a hill and am higher up.

I now think that hill was really Parnassus. My poetry-writing days had less than three months to go, and I believe I was realizing that the only place I could gain a purchase, with a view, *was* farther down. I needed to be where the air was thicker and the streets more full. I was meant to please, not thrill; to explain, not startle. In any case, down toward town was the direction I traveled; and that has made all the difference.

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People who inherit fortunes are lucky; I call them members of the lucky sperm club.

—*#8 ("Be Lucky") of* DONALD TRUMP*'s Top Ten Comeback Tips, in* The Art of the Comeback, *1997*

Try, if you can, to have an only son, to care for the family inheritance; that is the way wealth multiplies in one's halls.

—HESIOD, Works and Days, *c. 700* B.C.

Remember that money is of a prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. . . . He that kills a breeding-sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation. He that murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds.

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, "Advice to a Young Tradesman," *1748*

Money, which represents the prose of life, and which is hardly spoken of in parlors without an apology, is, in its effects and laws, as beautiful as roses.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "Nominalist and Realist," *1844*

I once saw (it must have been about 1832, of a sharp, bright January day) a bent, feeble but stout-built very old man, bearded, swathed in rich fur, with a great ermine cap on his head, led and assisted, almost carried, down the steps of his high front stoop (a dozen friends and servants, emulous, carefully holding, guiding him) and then lifted and tuck'd in a gorgeous sleigh, envelop'd in other furs, for a ride. The sleigh was drawn by as fine a team of horses as I ever saw.

—WALT WHITMAN, *on seeing John Jacob Astor,* Specimen Days, *1882*

Gentlemen: You have undertaken to cheat me. I won't sue you, for the law is slow. I'll ruin you. Yours truly, Cornelius Vanderbilt

—letter to his former business partners, Charles Morgan and Cornelius M. Garrison, 1853

"I'm glad you beat me, John. The last time you were beaten, I noticed the price of gasoline went up two cents a gallon."

—WILL ROGERS, *to John D. Rockefeller, Sr., after losing a round of golf in Ormond Beach, Florida, February, 1927*

The race was made for employment. Adam was created and placed in the Garden of Eden for business purposes; it would have been better for the race if he had attended closely to the occupation for which he was made.

—MATTHEW H. SMITH, The Elements of Business Success, *1854*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Money

COLLECTED BY ANDRÉ BERNARD

I have imbibed such a love of money that I keep some sequins in a drawer to count, & cry over them once a week.

—GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON, *letter, January 27, 1819*

Private persons accept these pieces of paper because they are confident that others will. The pieces of green paper have value because everybody thinks they have value. Everybody thinks they have value because in everybody's experience they have had value. . . . The United States could barely operate without a common and widely accepted medium of exchange (or at most a small number of such media); yet the existence of a common and widely accepted medium of exchange rests on a convention: our whole monetary system owes its existence to a mutual acceptance of what, from one point of view, is no more than a fiction.

—MILTON FRIEDMAN, Money Mischief, *1994*

My faithful old friend, Fatumak, assured me that there was in the village near-by a family whose wealth was unquestioned—acknowledged by everyone—and yet no one, not even the family itself, had ever laid eye or hand on this wealth; it consisted of an enormous *fei,* whereof the size is known only by tradition; for the past two or three generations it had been,

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and at that very time it was lying at the bottom of the sea! Many years ago an ancestor of this family, on an expedition after fei, secured this remarkably large and exceedingly valuable stone, which was placed on a raft to be towed homeward. A violent storm arose, and the party, to save their lives, were obliged to cut the raft adrift, and the stone sank out of sight. When they reached home, they all testified that the fei was of magnificent proportions and of extraordinary quality, and that it was lost through no fault of the owner. Thereupon it was universally conceded in their simple faith that the mere accident of its loss overboard was too trifling to mention, and that a few hundred feet of water off shore ought not to affect its marketable value, since it was all chipped out in proper form. The purchasing power of that stone remains, therefore, as valid as if it were leaning against the side of the owner's house.

—WILLIAM HENRY FURNESS,
The Island of Stone Money:
Uap and the Carolines, *1910*

It is better that a man should tyrannise over his bank balance than over his fellow citizens.

—JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES,
The General Theory of Employment,
Interest and Money, *1936*

Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons.

—WOODY ALLEN,
Horse Feathers, *1976*

Nothing seems completely to differentiate the poor but poverty. We find no adjectives to fit them, as a whole, only those of which Want is the mother. "Miserable" covers many; "shabby" most, and I am sadly aware that, in a large majority of minds, "disagreeable" includes them all.

—ALBION FELLOWS BACON,
Beauty for Ashes, *1914*

I am very much afraid that to the fiction writer the fact that we shall always have the poor with us is a source of satisfaction, for it means, essentially, that he will always be able to find someone like himself.

—FLANNERY O'CONNOR,
Mystery and Manners, *1963*

He wore a large diamond horseshoe in his tie and two or three solitaires or clusters on his fingers; his wife, dripping with necklaces, rings, earrings and bracelets, looked as though she had been pelted with ice cubes that somehow stuck where they landed. . . . To the small-timer, a diamond represented security. It impressed the booker, the manager, the audience, but more important, the diamond was collateral.

—FRED ALLEN,
on a successful vaudevillian:
Much Ado About Me, *1956*

EVER ONWARD—EVER ONWARD!
That's the spirit that has brought us fame!
We're big, but bigger we will be,
We can't fail for all can see
That to serve humanity has been our aim!

Our products now are known in every Zone,
Our reputation sparkles like a gem!
We've fought our way through—and new
Fields we're sure to conquer too
For the EVER ONWARD IBM.

— *IBM company anthem*

Came home; I to the taking of my wife's kitchen account at the latter end of the month, and there find 7*s* wanting—which did occasion a very high falling out between us; I indeed too eagerly insisting upon so poor a thing, and did give her very provoking words, calling her "beggar" and reproaching her friends; which she took very stomachfully, and reproached me justly with mine; and I confess, being myself, I cannot see what she could have done less. I find she is very cunning, and when she least shows it, hath her wit at work. . . . And I to my office to my month's accounts, and find myself worth 1270£—for which the Lord God be praised.

—SAMUEL PEPYS,
Diaries, *February 28, 1665*

If you don't have passion about who you are, about what you are trying to be, about where you are going, you might as well close this book right now and give up. Go get a job and relax, because you have no chance of making it.

—*#4 ("Be Passionate") of* DONALD TRUMP's
Top Ten Comeback Tips

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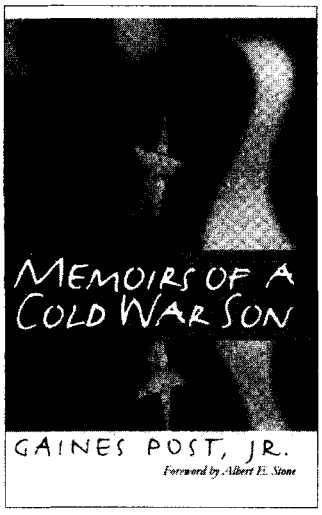

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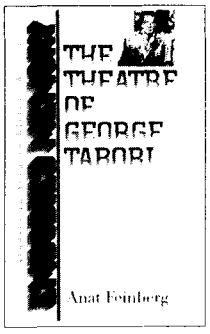

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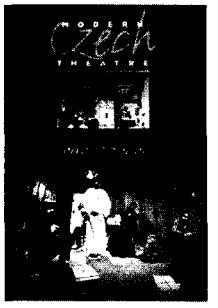

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England in Jamaica

Memories from a Colonial Boyhood

JERVIS ANDERSON

I was raised in the British colony that nearly broke Marcus Garvey's heart, not long after he began the career that would make him the most famous black nationalist leader in the world. In 1914, when Garvey—hoping to establish an international black empire—launched his Universal Negro Improvement Association, he sought to generate a mass following among his fellow Jamaicans as an impressive prelude to his entrance upon the world stage. But he miscalculated their potential support: only a handful rallied behind his grandiose project. He had not reckoned with the tenacious grip that British colonial influence exerted upon the psychology of his countrymen. "Where is the black man's government?" he asked. "Where is his king and his kingdom? Where is his president, his country and his ambassador, his army, his navy, his men of big affairs?" Jamaicans seemed indifferent to such questions. Wounded by the cool local response, Garvey set sail from his homeland, aiming to cultivate his messianic vision on more receptive soil in the United States. Soon after settling in New York, in 1916, he charged Jamaicans with a poverty of national spirit, with a habit, he said, of "looking to the Mother Country for everything."

That wasn't quite so true two decades later, when I was a small boy. But, as I gradually came to see, the evidence on which Garvey had based his indictment was still abundant. Most Jamaicans still regarded them-

The late Jervis Anderson was the author of *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait, 1900–1950; A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait; Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen;* and *Guns in American Life.* A staff writer for *The New Yorker* for thirty years, he also served on the SCHOLAR's Editorial Board.

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selves as British subjects contented with their allegiance to the Union Jack, the only flag they had ever known. That deeply rooted allegiance had originated in 1655, when an expedition of Cromwell's sailors and soldiers seized Jamaica from Spain, making it one of England's earliest possessions in the Caribbean. Despite its subsequent experience with slavery and imperial rule, much of Jamaican society became almost as Anglophile as that of Barbados—whose citizens proudly described their Caribbean home as "Little England." Predominantly African in origin, Jamaicans were also predominantly British in feeling. That condition prevailed until the late 1930s and early 1940s, when a national movement—founded and led by leftist intellectuals in the city of Kingston—began challenging the colonial system and the pervasiveness of British feeling.

In the little rural village where I lived until I was nine years old, Kingston and its progressive intellectuals were only a rumor. Chatham was situated roughly midway between the towns of Falmouth and Montego Bay, on Jamaica's north coast, and its residents appeared so quiescently adapted to their colonial way of living that they seemed never to have imagined an alternative. Devoutly religious, they made up the most cloistered and provincial community I've known.

One of my earliest impressions of my fellow Chathamites was their reflexive recoil from the secular life of towns. They ventured into such places only on missions they could not avoid: to shop in clothing and hardware stores; to pay their taxes at government offices; to consult the legal and medical specialists who were unavailable in their village. And they no sooner completed their transactions than they began hurrying back home, making sure they were out of town before the neon lights of saloons and movie houses began coming on; for they associated such illuminations with the moral decadence of urban experience. I knew all of this because my father, an ardent churchman, was always among those beating a hasty retreat from Falmouth or Montego Bay—even though briskness of movement was not among his usual characteristics.

Chatham was founded by eighteenth-century English settlers, arriving to explore new futures for themselves while also helping to consolidate their nation's expanding colonial empire. But the village was virtually all-black when I began growing up there. Descendants of the original settlers had been drifting away for decades, resettling in or near towns, where opportunities were plentiful, particularly in the fields of law, medicine, government service, and the import-export sectors of business. The lone white presence in the Chatham of my day (and he hadn't been born there) was the Reverend Alfred Miller, an aging English clergyman, who pastored at our only church—a legacy of the Baptist missionary movement in Britain. He had been preaching there for some years before my eyes opened, and he was the first white person I ever saw. That was not his

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only distinction. In the eyes of older villagers, perhaps in his own as well, he was Chatham's most important cultural figure, its indispensable religious leader, its resident symbol of British colonial authority.

The high-gabled edifice in which he ministered, the largest and oldest building in Chatham, objectified the durable religious and cultural interests he represented. It was constructed of white cut-stone, a sort of granite, which appeared impervious to centuries of tropical wind and rain. The imperishable slate tiles covering its roof testified further to its history of resisting rot. Its tall lancet-shaped glass windows helped to capture the aesthetic feeling of Chathamites: tinted in a mosaic of colors, they shone most appealingly in the soft sunlight of early mornings and late afternoons.

Reverend Miller's church dominated moral and social life in Chatham, though that was partly because it was a kind of natural monopoly, without competition for the winning of souls. From its prominent vantage near the top of a grassy incline on one side of our macadamized thoroughfare, it seemed to be scrutinizing all goings-on within its view. And since it frowned upon all but the tamest secular entertainments, it organized and presented its own: mostly harvest festivals, garden parties, and country fairs—at some of which the folks, young and old, waltzed primly around quaint-looking maypoles. That was the only form of social dancing the church encouraged on its premises or on any other. An enterprising promoter—a stranger, say—who had dared to open a Friday-night or Saturday-night dance hall in Chatham would soon have gone bankrupt: he would have had little patronage from that overwhelmingly religious community. There were no police constables in the villages and none were needed. By the Damoclean threat of its condemnation, the church kept the peace and enforced law and order. Its ministry of rectitude openly censured—on occasion, even expelled from its benches—members whose conduct it deemed egregiously offensive.

I later found it hard to believe that such an austere, almost Calvinist, ministry could be embodied in a man like the Reverend Mr. Miller. In appearance and informal style, he was as mild and grandfatherly a cleric as one could imagine. Short and slight of build, he spoke softly and amicably; his hair was as white as the snows of his native Yorkshire; and his wire-rimmed granny glasses provided the only note of severity in his otherwise gentle aspect.

He did have one characteristic that inspired quiet mirth, though only among the children in his church. When his work in the pulpit required him to raise and project his voice to the back benches of the congregation, a pronounced lisp was revealed, each sibilance sounding like a whistle. This so amused the youngsters that we listened far more attentively to the music of his sibilances than to the religious message he was striving to convey. His lisping was a blessed diversion: it kept us from falling asleep during the wordy and interminable Baptist sermons. In any

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case, even if we had been able to comprehend it, we didn't think the high seriousness of preaching was meant for us. But the grownups in Reverend Miller's audience might have boxed our ears had they even guessed at the mirth we were careful to suppress. He was a hero to them. They loved his British accent, speech impediment and all; they felt it diffused a quality of sophistication over their back-country pulpit.

Why were they, almost everyone in Chatham, so hospitable to that influence? It was a question I could not answer then. Only in looking back, years later, did I recognize that Chathamites, like many sheltered rural villagers, simply had no progressive political awareness. They were fulfilled by churchgoing, Bible reading, family life, and the simple pleasures of neighborliness. They did not brood over the injustices of the slavery their ancestors had undergone. They neither discussed nor debated controversial public issues, though the press and radio told them what those issues were. It did not even seem to concern them that until the mid-1940s—when the British colonial authorities introduced universal adult suffrage—only property-owning taxpayers had the (not yet very meaningful) right to vote.

But well before all of that dawned on me, there was hardly a time when I did not find myself reflecting upon the conspicuous human circumstance of Reverend Miller. Though he was, in effect, a sort of white castaway on the island of our black village, he displayed no sign of loneliness or uprootedness. He seemed more at ease in that little rural outpost—so distant and different from the racial environment that had produced him—than one would have expected a solitary white foreigner to be. Wondering how he managed to achieve such a poise, I ventured to believe that he did so at considerable personal sacrifice, that he could not have been immune to feelings of displacement and isolation, that he bravely endured them on behalf of ideals he considered more important than himself. Where his life in our community was concerned, those ideals could have been only two: his devotion to a Christianizing ministry abroad and his commitment to the colonizing mission of his homeland.

After moving with my parents from Chatham, I never again heard of Reverend Miller, and I often wondered what had become of him. It wasn't implausible to surmise that he stayed on in Chatham until he died, and that his adopted churchyard was where he wished to be buried—a wish that would have been shared by the villagers who revered him. His may be among the many graves of English missionaries scattered overseas: memorials to the service they rendered a colonial empire upon which, in their lifetimes, the sun always shone.

When my father announced that we would be leaving Chatham to resettle in the town of Falmouth, I considered it prudent to conceal my enthusiasm, lest a display of it might cause him to reverse his decision. Because his enthusiasms and mine were almost never in har-

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mony, I feared that he would see the rare concurrence as a sign that he had made a mistake. He usually felt that any prospect that pleased me greatly was bound to harbor troublesome consequences for him, a feeling analogous to that of a colonial regime when it viewed the livelier political assertions of the people it governed.

I also concealed my surprise at the news of our impending departure to Falmouth. It was a step I had never imagined my father taking. I knew the dislike for towns that he shared with his xenophobic fellow villagers. And, in any case, I didn't think his style and personality were suited to the swift and fluid pace of urban living, as I had heard it described. Firm in his ways and convictions, my father hardly ever altered them once he had formed them. That solidity, I felt, had been fostered as much by his profession—he was a contractor and builder—as by the biblical influence of his naming. His devoutly religious parents had christened him Peter, after the apostolic "Rock" on whose shoulders Jesus hoped that "my church" would be established.

The orthodoxies that shaped my father's character were reflected in the manner of his walking: slow, sure-footed, unswerving. It was a picture of stability and integrity, an image that any boy could, or should, admire in his father; and I did in mine. But the picture also presented an image of rigidity, and that I could not admire, for it exemplified the inflexible opinions my old man always imposed on me. In his starched gait I saw evidence that he had never learned to dance or to play athletic games: exercises that train mind and body to anticipate and collaborate with sudden shifts and variations in movement. There was another reason I had thought he would never consider moving to a town. I had formed the impression that he wished to confine my upbringing to the strait and proper paths of the village life that reared him, lest I succumb to the laxities of an urban environment.

In most of those matters, my father was sharply different from my mother, who was easygoing in style and imposed no inflexible opinions. She had no fear or dislike of towns; and, having lived a part of her girlhood near Montego Bay, she had learned to dance. Younger and more gregarious than my father, she was known for hearty and ringing laughter in an upper register of her soprano. She loved singing the early ballads of Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, and Ella Fitzgerald, which she had learned from hit parades on the radio. When my father could not help hearing such worldly sounds in his house, he pretended (his face shielded by an open newspaper) that he was deaf to them. I supposed it to be his way of preserving domestic concord. His favorite songs were the old English hymns of Isaac Watts and the arias from Handel's *Messiah,* some of which he practiced in the church choir. For a man so seemingly unmusical, he sang them surprisingly well. One of his sisters, the church organist, had taught him the proper expression

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of religious music. But I couldn't imagine his attempting something as playful and zestful as one of my mother's favorites, such as Ella Fitzgerald's "A-Tisket, A-Tasket, a Green and Yellow Basket."

Falmouth, a picturesque old coastal town, was once famous as the chief Jamaican port from which sugar and rum were shipped to England. It was the capital of Trelawny parish, which teemed with sugarcane plantations during and for some time after slavery. But, as a number of these plantations failed in the postslavery economy, Falmouth gradually lost its importance as a major center for the export of sugarcane products. When our family began living there, most of the spacious warehouses along its harbor lay in ghostly emptiness, and the majority of its wooden wharves were rotting and collapsing into the sea. Only now and then did a ship from England or Canada steam in to take on a cargo of sugar, bringing a rare stimulus to the depressed longshore industry. Otherwise, Falmouth remained charmingly antiquated in appearance. With the largest stock of surviving Georgian houses in Jamaica, it had the look of an architectural museum, reposing in an irrevocable yet indestructible state of obsolescence.

To my father's displeasure, though hardly to his surprise, I fell in love with Falmouth. Despite its antique townscape, it offered modern entertainments, exciting to a boy from the quiet countryside, where much of life was ruled by religious stricture. Falmouth was where I saw my first movies: *Firefly* (with Jeanette McDonald), *Gaslight* (Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman), *The Lodger* (Laird Cregar), *Son of Fury* (Tyrone Power), *Cluny Brown* (Jennifer Jones), *The Sea Hawk* (Errol Flynn), *Casablanca* (Humphrey Bogart and the delightful Miss Bergman). Falmouth was also where I learned to dance and to play cricket, soccer, and softball. I had just begun learning to play billiards when my father put a firm stop to that. Though billiards meant nothing to him, it sufficed him to know that the game was played chiefly in the town's poolroom, whose smoke-filled and latently boozy culture he held in the lowest esteem—especially because he had been raised to despise smoking and drinking.

New friends in town had also begun teaching me to swim. But that enterprise dictated its own end one afternoon, when, venturing beyond my depth, I narrowly escaped drowning. After dragging me back to safety, the fellows solicitously escorted me home, as if assisting a comrade in reveling who had had too much to drink. And no sooner had they deposited me gently at my front door than they scattered swiftly to their various homes. I couldn't blame them for wanting to avoid a confrontation with my father. They knew as well as I did that he would have held them chiefly responsible for my misadventure at the beach. When I explained to my father the near-fatal experience from which I had returned, he sounded more vindicated than alarmed. I should take the experience, he curtly

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advised me, as a lesson in what came of disobedience to his commandments. I was not surprised by his unsympathetic verdict. It was the predictable response of a man who had seen the rural foundation of his parental authority steadily eroded by his son's pursuit of urban pleasures.

I never did resume my instruction in billiards and swimming. But I missed the company of my adventuresome tutors, town boys who seemed to discover and define themselves through the delights and risks of disobedience. I later thought of them as youthful versions of the Jamaican political nationalists who had begun a defiant struggle for independence from British colonial parenthood.

Growing up in the secluded Baptist village of Chatham, I had been aware of no religious denomination other than the one to which I belonged; the whole world was Baptist, for all I knew. It was in Falmouth that I encountered a diversity of Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Presbyterians, and Wesleyans (as the Methodists preferred to call themselves). The Anglicans were the most prestigious of the denominations, mainly because of their relationship with the mother church in England. They were also the most ethnically mixed: successful black professionals and civil servants, thriving Chinese grocers, prosperous Syrian and Lebanese dry-goods merchants, elite Sephardic Jewish families, well-to-do descendants of a dwindling English patriciate.

Not surprisingly, it was the predominantly black Baptist congregation that my father joined in Falmouth. The William Knibb Memorial Chapel was named after the English missionary who had begun preaching there early in the 1800s and became one of the leading agitators against slavery—particularly in Trelawny parish, with its profusion of sugarcane estates. Knibb's radical ministry put him in serious jeopardy with his fellow English expatriates, many of whom formed the slave-owning sugar plantocracy. Loathing the Baptist preacher as a demagogic traitor to his country and his race, the plantocrats conspired to silence him, by means that did not exclude the possibility of murder. But Knibb survived to celebrate the triumph of his crusade. It was from his pulpit in Falmouth—at midnight on July 31, 1838—that he announced the abolition of slavery. "The monster is dead," he declared amidst tremendous applause from an overflow audience of emancipated sufferers.

My father could scarcely have been prouder of his affiliation with the Baptist congregation William Knibb had made the most famous in Jamaica. But his new historical pride, together with his old religious zeal, was to have a doleful consequence for me. He soon decided that the improvement of my mind and character required that I attend Knibb's memorial chapel four times on Sundays: twice for Sunday school, twice for the adult gatherings. I did not, of course, share his enthusiasm—any more than he shared mine for billiards and swimming. In fact, while balking at the cruel burden he had imposed on me, I thought that *his*

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mind could do with some improvement—for staring him in the face was an irony he seemed unable to recognize. It was an exemplary fight for freedom that had won his reverence for William Knibb's memory; yet here he was, in Knibb's own church, saddling me with a form of involuntary servitude. I knew of no other boy in Falmouth who was required to attend church four times on Sundays. But my father stood firmly by his parental prerogative. And since I had no intention of yielding meekly to it, our weekly Sunday battles, none of which I ever won, were as fierce as they were inevitable.

My mother usually listened in silence to those hostilities. She resisted the indiscretion of intervening openly in disciplinary struggles between father and growing son, lest she should undermine the authority of the one or the morale of the other. But, knowing her to be an instinctive democrat—especially in the cause of underdogs—I did not doubt whose side she was really on. I also felt, correctly as it turned out, that she would await an appropriate juncture at which to initiate secret diplomatic negotiations on my behalf. Her prudent and patient strategy paid off. One Sunday morning, my father—displaying a magnanimity of which I had despaired—put an arm around my shoulder and said that he had decided to relax his rigid religious demand on me: I would no longer be compelled to attend Knibb's church four times on Sundays. Twice would be enough.

Much as I welcomed his astonishing news, I heard in it a tone of self-congratulation. He took it for granted that his act of generosity stemmed from the fund of parental power he was in no way bound to yield. For lurking behind his concession, as I surely realized, was his knowledge that my "emancipation" was neither total nor irrevocable. Like a colonial governor conceding a measure of local self-rule, he knew that it remained within his province or his pleasure to cancel the limited freedom he had granted me. But I didn't think anything further was to be earned by examining his hidden calculations. I was satisfied with the dimension of liberty I had gained from his religious bondage.

No degree of self-determination could be won at the colonial elementary school I attended in Falmouth. The governance there yielded not an inch of its power. Fittingly, I thought, the school, looking out upon the sea, was housed in a fortresslike building that had been a garrison for British soldiers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Its thick stone walls appeared impenetrable, even to the cannonballs that French and Spanish warships must once have fired at them. Our headmaster, R. A. Hammond, was himself a kind of stone wall, reflecting the stolid British colonial discipline that had forged him. R. A. (as we called him among ourselves) was in his early fifties when my father placed me in his charge. A light-skinned Jamaican, he had the tall and muscular build

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of a linebacker in American football. His head was cleanly shaved, he wore only white poplin suits, and his loud baritone intimidated us nearly as much as did his formidable physique.

Only two boys in school seemed unawed by him: Ramsay Price and his friend Willie Francis, a duo of incorrigible outlaws. While classmates struggled with the difficulties of assigned texts, Ramsay and Willie relaxed with comic books—selections from their ever-growing library of *Superman, Wonder Woman, Captain America, Dick Tracy, The Phantom,* and *The Lone Ranger.* They terrorized smaller boys; ridiculed anyone they thought was aspiring to academic excellence; marched out of the schoolhouse and marched back in, as they pleased. When, on occasion, they saw R. A. striding angrily in their direction, they jumped from their seats, leaped across desktops—trampling upon books and knocking over inkwells—while leading the headmaster in a futile and risible chase around the classroom. And whenever Ramsay's comic books ceased to command his interest, he sat sucking contemplatively on a thumb, his eyes roaming the classroom, as if studying the next opportunity for disruption. R. A. eventually gave up on the unruly pair. He seemed to have reached the conclusion that they wouldn't amount to much, wouldn't make it to the bottom rung on "the ladder of success"—a term he liked using to pound ambition into his students. Even I (who felt a degree of admiration for their anarchic spirit) had to admit that they were well beyond the reach of civil correction. If Ramsay knew that his father, a tall and elegant apiarist, had named him after the first Labour prime minister of Britain, the knowledge had had no discernible effect upon his conduct. Many years later, when I began living in New York, I read Ralph Waldo Ellison's acknowledgment of the literary inspiration he had drawn from the exemplar of his two given names. No similar influence had invaded the imagination of Ramsay MacDonald Price.

The problem of his two outlaws aside, R. A. was the absolute monarch of his school. A strict enforcer of law and order, he dealt severely with those who arrived after the opening bell rang at nine o'clock. He permitted no chatting, or even whispering, in his classroom. He instantly disqualified anyone caught cheating during an exam. On the few occasions when there seemed to be a short relief from his surveillance, in his temporary absence from a classroom, there could be no safe outbreak of disregard for his regulations. Prefects had been secretly appointed to spy upon classmates, take down names, and report to the headmaster when he returned.

For the chastisement of transgressors, those he observed and those reported to him, R. A. employed a heavy leather strap he carried folded in a back pocket. When he unsheathed and unfurled it, we were required to extend a palm and receive his delivery of six lashes. Flinching, understandably, at the terrible descent of his strap, we sometimes withdrew a

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palm at the last moment, causing him to miss his target. It wasn't advisable to do that too often. R. A. would take it to mean we were making a fool of him; and, losing his patience and his temper, he would deliver the remaining punishment over our backs.

Though this often raised welts that lasted for hours, we dared not complain to parents when we arrived home. That would have been useless; they would merely have endorsed the harshness of the headmaster's penalty. They themselves had been brought up under the system of corporal punishment that prevailed in all colonial elementary schools. Adults now, they remained faithful to a tacit compact between the authority at school and the one at home: the prerogative of every teacher was a legitimate extension of parental discipline. For that reason, I trembled whenever I observed my father and my headmaster conversing on a street corner in town. I assumed, though not always correctly, that they were discussing me, exchanging critical reports and estimates of my conduct.

Risking no dilution of his power over us, R. A. meddled in every form and phase of our extracurricular activities. Intruding, for instance, into the affairs of our cricket team, he went so far as to impose on us the captain of his choice. In the sense of fair play, that was "not cricket." It infringed the one self-governing privilege to which schoolboys were entitled: the right to elect their own leaders on the playing field. R. A. surely knew that. But the democracy of the playing field was in direct conflict with his desire for total control. He wanted no boy in his school, however highly regarded by classmates, exercising any form of authority that had not been conferred by the headmaster. That policy, as he well knew, drew heavily from a principle of British colonial rule: select a safe and obedient local leadership; permit no freedom of choice.

So I was by no means flattered when he once conferred the mantle of captaincy on me. What "safe" qualification for leadership had I displayed? Whatever credential he saw in me I did not see in myself. I was certainly not the best batsman or bowler on our cricket eleven, and my character was not markedly superior to that of any other player. Far from being flattered, I was embarrassed to have gained my elevation at the cost of democratic procedure. And, in my distress, I was not surprised that my teammates now looked upon me, or down on me, as a handpicked tool of the reigning autocracy. I thought of resigning the captaincy, but resignation was virtually impossible. No one dared refuse a kingly crown proffered by R. A. Those he installed in high positions stayed installed until their tenures expired or until he had his own reason to banish them from office. Even if resignation had been an exercisable option, we would have forfeited the headmaster's esteem; and few among us could afford a loss of that magnitude. A persuasive instructor, R. A. had talked most of us into believing that our place in his esteem, high or low, preordained our future on "the ladder of success."

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Despite our many gripes against his monarchical manner, we could not help acknowledging R. A.'s excellence as a pedagogue. He was an old-fashioned academic generalist whose rigorous colonial training had prepared him to master every subject in the elementary school curriculum: history, physics, arithmetic, biology, botany, economic geography, civics, penmanship, English grammar and composition. None of the younger teachers on the staff he supervised could match his versatility.

He was also a fine pianist and an impressive performer on the magnificent pipe organ he played at the Anglican church on Sunday evenings. I sometimes heard him there. A number of my classmates liked inviting me to share their rich Anglican liturgy, a nourishment they felt my pinched Baptist soul could use. None of us ever ceased to marvel at our headmaster's work at the Sunday-evening organ. In his graceful renditions of Bach and Mozart and Buxtehude, we could hardly recognize the glowering despot of our weekdays. We had to admit that his excellent all-round abilities were a tribute to the old colonial tutelage that had formed him. Still, some of us wished that he had been thoughtful enough to discard certain cultural influences of that tutelage.

One of these influences was his inherited allegiance to Empire Day. That occasion, observed annually on the twenty-fourth of May, memorialized the birth and symbolic achievements of Queen Victoria; and, as such, it was more flattering to the mother country than to her colonized children. True, most Jamaicans—raised with an immaculate regard for Victoria's memory—had never entertained an unkind feeling about her. Indeed, the photographs from her later life reminded nearly everyone of a beloved grandmother. But the old queen was more than just a dear-looking matriarch. She was the monarch who had wielded the scepter of British colonial dominion for more than half of the nineteenth century—up until the first year of the twentieth, when she died. So there was no compelling sentimental reason for a society of colonized ex-slaves to be celebrating Victoria's birth and the imperial triumphs of her reign.

R. A. did not share that view. For about a week before the twenty-fourth of May, he drilled and rehearsed us in a program of "patriotic" singing. And when Empire Day arrived, he canceled all classes (perhaps our only real profit from the occasion), organized an assembly in front of the local town hall, and conducted us through a festival of imperial anthems. "God Save Our Gracious King" was obligatory: Britain's national anthem, like its flag, was also that of her colonial possessions abroad. But other anthems on R. A.'s Empire Day program were among his sentimental favorites, reflecting the warm colonial feeling his history had engendered in him. And, following the commands of his baton, we sang none of them so fervently as we did "There'll Always Be an England," "Land of Hope and Glory (Mother of the Free)," and "Rule Britannia"—its refrain proclaiming militantly that "Britons never, never, never will be slaves."

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We did not, of course, understand the true import of our singing, that we were in fact rhapsodizing over the pride and freedom of the nation to which we owed our colonized subjection. Many of us did not even know what it really meant to be colonized. But if we were too young to recognize the paradox of our praise-songs, R. A. surely was not. Why, then, was he so passionate in his leadership on Empire Day? Did it mean he was a conscious advocate of imperial rule—at the expense of a sovereignty none of us, including himself, had ever enjoyed? It was a tempting conclusion, but it would have been incorrect. It would have been too facile a reading of the complex cultural phenomenon R. A. represented in Jamaican life.

Only when I emerged from under his tutelage and began attending high school in Kingston, where a small group of radical intellectuals nurtured the spring of anti-colonial agitation, did I feel intelligent enough to look searchingly at the question of R. A.'s Britannic sentimentalities. I came to the conclusion—fairer and more plausible than the one to which I'd been tempted to come in Falmouth—that he was unconsciously in thrall to an inherited influence of his upbringing, that he had never seriously examined the political implication of the colonial or colonized attitude he displayed. The paeans to the mother country he had us singing were the ones he himself had been singing, uncritically, since childhood. And now that he had grown up to become a shaper of young minds, he remained in the power of his earliest memories. When he listened proudly to the choir he conducted on Empire Days, I didn't think he was conscious of listening to voices descended from slavery and colonization. I thought he was enjoying echoes of his blissful childhood—from a time in the past when most Jamaicans still envisioned their island as a sun-dappled extension of the mother country.

A week or two after graduating from high school in Kingston, I became a trainee journalist at the *Gleaner,* then as now Jamaica's newspaper of record. Like the two other trainees hired that summer, I was ecstatic to have been spared the anxieties of job hunting and to have been recruited by the oldest and most prestigious publication in Jamaica. We felt that manna had fallen upon us. But as the intoxication wore off, we realized that our good fortune was something less than manna. We had earned it. We were the survivors of a series of competitive tests the *Gleaner* had conducted among graduating high school seniors.

I wondered, however, why the *Gleaner* had invested so much time and effort in recruiting a trio of tyros. After all, it could easily have drawn from an available pool of experienced and unemployed journalists, some of whom would have done serious violence for the opportunity to work at that distinguished establishment. This answer came gradually to me: we were regarded an exploitable resource. The *Gleaner* paid us at a menial

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rate while working us almost as hard as it did high-salaried reporters and subeditors (as copy editors were called). Nor did the paper seem to care whether or not we liked the conditions of our employment. If we didn't—so its attitude implied—then we were free to pursue options elsewhere in daily journalism. But that was a mocking concession of our freedom. The paper surely knew that we had no options in daily journalism, that there was no "elsewhere" out there: in those days, the *Gleaner* was the island's only daily paper.

The editorial tears it often shed over its solitary position—bemoaning the absence of a competing daily newspaper—were crocodile tears. For the *Gleaner,* aggressively wielding its political and economic power, did not hesitate to crush every emerging challenger to its monopoly. It welcomed no intruder into its daily sunlight. The conspicuous privilege it enjoyed was supported and protected by the conservative colonial establishment, whose interests it voiced and defended.

Partly for that reason, I began subscribing to progressive political magazines from England. The one I found most appealing was the weekly *New Statesman.* Edited by intellectuals on the left, it had such contributors as Aneurin Bevan; his wife, Jenny Lee; Michael Foot; Stafford Cripps; Hugh Dalton; Herbert Morrison; and other prominent thinkers in the British Labour Party. All were zealous advocates of the de-colonization policy that Clement Attlee's Labour government had introduced immediately after World War II. (That was, of course, much to the chagrin of Winston Churchill, Attlee's Tory predecessor and successor, who found occasion to say that he had not been elected to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.)

The Jamaican ideologues who organized the movement for local autonomy were influenced first by English Fabian socialists and later by the British Labour Party. I read the *New Statesman* only in the privacy of my residence, as if it were an underground publication. I never took it with me to my office at the *Gleaner,* fearing that Tory-minded overseers might discover and excommunicate me as the carrier of a subversive disease. That fear was not unfounded. It was generally known that the *Gleaner* viewed as treasonous most political stances that differed from its own. Editorially, even in some of its news reports, it assailed people and organizations that favored an end to British colonial rule.

Yet I did form an admiration for the *Gleaner*'s editor-in-chief, and not only because he was the first black journalist ever raised to that position. A tall, handsome, and articulate man in his early forties, he had a competent and authoritarian manner that had caused him to be nicknamed "the Bull." I was impressed by his ferocious intelligence and his extraordinary professional abilities. While setting the *Gleaner*'s editorial tone and defining its position on public issues, he also imposed his judgment upon all the departmental editors under his control—as if he were more knowl-

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edgeable than they were in their areas of responsibility. I often heard him finding fault with the coverage they assigned to economics; labor and agriculture and parliamentary politics; music and theater and painting—even sports, an area in which I didn't think he was nearly the authority he professed to be. But he was an excellent judge in the many subjects he knew and a great bluffer in the few he didn't. He always sounded right. He was a polymath, partly by his wide reading and early experience as a beat reporter, partly by sheer instinct. I could see why the older colleagues he supervised—including some who secretly detested his authoritarian manner—regarded him as the most gifted daily journalist in the Caribbean.

But there was an aspect of his able chief-editorship that embarrassed me on his behalf—and might even have privately embarrassed him, too. In a sense, he was a figurehead, a brilliant mouthpiece. A price of his high position was that he was required to express certain editorial views that were not necessarily his own: they represented the conservative colonial politics of the *Gleaner*'s business ownership, the ownership that had elevated him to the editor's chair. Listening to him in his informal moments, I suspected that his own views were populist and politically progressive. I didn't think he could have been comfortable writing his vigorous editorials against the movement for local self-determination—a number of whose leaders were his close social acquaintances.

Despite my esteem for my editor-in-chief, I resigned from the *Gleaner* after about a year. I was not inspired to continue serving an institution that was clearly hostile to a national idea, that of self-government, in which I increasingly believed. This meant, of course, that I was now without a future in the narrow world of daily journalism, which the *Gleaner* bestrode like a colossus. But I happily accepted a position at *Public Opinion,* one of the two weekly papers then published in Kingston. Intellectually, *P.O.* was an appropriate place for me, more compatible with my maturing political and social outlook. As the unofficial organ of the People's National Party, it echoed that party's campaign for an end to colonial rule. And I was further stimulated by my association with a journal whose high literary standards reminded me of the *New Statesman.*

Most of the writers and editors at *Public Opinion* were not professional journalists but cultural and political intellectuals: men and women who adopted the paper as a spiritual home for their progressive national hopes and ideals. They included poets, novelists, playwrights, painters, sculptors, literary critics, and irreverent political essayists. Only by osmosis and ambition could I claim a relationship with that brilliant constellation of minds. One of them was Derek Walcott, the St. Lucian–born poet and playwright, who was then completing undergraduate studies at the University of the West Indies in Kingston. While colleagues at *Public Opinion* instantly recognized his talent and his promise, none of us—perhaps not

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even Walcott himself—envisioned his future as a Nobel laureate in literature: the preeminent poet of Caribbean experience, as the Swedish Academy described him.

As poorly as I had been paid at the big and affluent *Gleaner,* I expected to fare even worse at the small and economically insecure *Public Opinion.* Because of its leftist politics, *P.O.* did not, like the *Gleaner,* attract advertising from large corporations or from the colonial government it frequently denounced. Between government and big business there seemed an unspoken conspiracy to starve *P.O.* to death. Beyond its modest income from circulation and friendly communal advertisers, *Public Opinion* appeared to subsist mainly on the strength of its national convictions. Michael Manley, the future prime minister, who had been a writer and editor at *P.O.* before I arrived there, saw the paper's survival as a financial miracle.

I, too, was to recognize that miracle and what I thought was an even greater one: the economically struggling *Public Opinion* more than doubled the emoluments I had received at the prosperous *Gleaner.* The little weekly paper contributed significantly not only to my youthful intellectual development but also to the funds I accumulated before leaving, in 1959, to enter a university in New York.

With the faithful support of *P.O.,* the People's National Party built the movement that achieved Jamaican independence in the summer of 1962. Regrettably, I could not be there to help celebrate the new constitution or to observe its early aftermath. But, as I learned from sections of Jamaica's migrant community in Manhattan, the attainment of self-rule did not immediately dispel the conservative opposition and skepticism it had overcome. For some time after, a constituency of Anglophiles—including some who were called "Afro-Saxons"—remained doubtful that independence from the mother country was a wise or viable course for their island to undertake. I was not surprised by their loyalist resistance. After all, it was chiefly they who, in 1955, had organized tercentenary celebrations of British rule in Jamaica. I did not think that more than three hundred years of psychological submission to colonialism could be magically abrogated by a constitutional stroke of the pen.

I had observed many like them in Kingston, many who were more wittingly Anglophile than my elementary school headmaster in Falmouth. As conspicuous middle-class achievers, they had few objections to the colonial system that had produced and selectively rewarded them. The bible of their cultural outlook was the monopolistic and conservative *Gleaner.* Their personal progress reasonably assured, they were not aroused by the objective of nationhood or by the need to develop a progressive local consciousness. That was for others to do: those in the awakening national movement who had acquired no colonial privileges

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worth preserving, who owed no loyalty to a system that had historically excluded them from social and economic opportunity. By "others," the Anglophiles generally meant the masses. They did not realize that the "others" also included the small group of radical intellectuals—most of them incubated, like the conservative leaders, in privileged educational institutions—who were to organize the masses into a progressive national movement. There was a strong feeling among the thriving colonial conservatives, some of whom imagined themselves to be nearly as privileged as the ruling British elite, that the new enterprise in self-government would fail and that its collapse would lead to a restoration of the colonial regime. The enterprise did not fail, and its opponents gradually reconciled themselves to the local autonomy won by progressive mass agitation.

This endgame and much that preceded it reflected one of the ironies of British colonial influence. On the whole, there were two contrasting elements in the successful Jamaican middle class. One was satisfied with the social and other economic privileges it had acquired; the other used those privileges to create a leadership for advanced political change. The latter included Norman Manley, a prominent Oxford-educated barrister, whose People's National Party founded the movement for national independence. Among his lieutenants and successors was his son, Michael, a graduate of the London School of Economics. The conservative faction also included leaders and members who had studied at prestigious English universities. It is therefore an interesting contradiction that while the British colonial system produced the self-satisfied middle-class achievers who upheld and preserved its imperial interests, it also trained—however unintentionally—the radical middle-class intellectuals who, in the end, fatally undermined its survival.

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Spring Peepers, April, Wassergass

LEN ROBERTS

They leap, big as baby rabbits
from the pond's edge
as I swerve in with the tractor's
deck
to whack the weeds already
grown too high, early April,
their astoundingly plump bodies
suspended
a split-second above the green
water
that mirrors them, legs stretched,
a mix between a dive and belly flop

I've often seen my children perform
at this very spot
while I watched the surface for
their heads to pop up,
say they're all right, their own
kind of croak

that reminded me of how I would
drift nights in a boat more than thirty
years ago
on a lake whose name I can't bring
back,
how the flashlight stunned the frogs
on pads, logs, in shallows of muck,
my hands snatching them up to toss
into the burlap bag
from where, in the pitch-black night,
would rise sudden spurts of song.

Len Roberts is the author of *The Trouble-Making Finch* and *Counting the Black Angels*. His poems have recently appeared in *Poetry, Partisan Review,* and the *Kenyon Review*.

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The Mystery of Max Schmitt

PHILIP DACEY

Champion Single Sculls (1871)
by Thomas Eakins
Metropolitan Museum of Art

In a few years, money will corrupt
even sculling, the bets and scandals
sink industrial America's first
public sport—the rower as hero,
the newspapers awash with statistics,
the dimensions of boats—

but now I am fresh from victory,
letting myself enjoy the drift
after exertion, a starboard turn
past where I have turned
to look over my shoulder
and find you standing on the bank.

Here the river, a wide paten,
lifts light like a host,
the bread of time
an arrested moment,
nothing cast away in a vain hope
of multiplying it.
Here I am a pause
within a pause.

My paddles feather in the water
just enough to slip under its skin.

A lawyer by trade, used to the drag and shock
of statutes and codes,
I love the language of rowing, its purl
against the hull—

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to feather, to settle,
to catch, kiss, cox,
to fly and die,
but, most, to swing,
to move in a perfect harmony
of body and boat, muscle and machine,
until boundaries dissolve
and the sky could be water,
the water my rushing thought.

In the middle distance, Tom,
twenty-seven and just back from France,
ambitious to part all the waters,
strains in a boat that carries his name.
Our wakes tell the story,
how we passed each other,
two old friends from boyhood,
just before you came.

Such a spacious afternoon on the Schuylkill,
such a promise of easy freedom,
yet I hold you fast,
the light turning my skin
nearly white, like that of some
athletic ghost
as my eyes fix you in their gaze,
from which you cannot escape,
though you will proceed on your way.

For I knew you would be there
when I looked over my shoulder.
It is why I turned to this side,
singling you out from the others,
and why you wonder

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about our connection, the strength
of what burns between us in the air,
as if I were more than myself, or other—
Tom, say, looking out through these eyes,
his absorption in his own rowing
a deliberate misdirection,
or even you,
that too familiar stranger
glanced in the calm surface of any mirror
and stroked furiously away from
for so many years.

A sculler, I must face backwards
to move forwards,
so that looking over my shoulder
I seem to be moving into a future
that is already, before its time, all past.

How strange now to hold both oars loosely in one hand!
Like the four ducks that have folded their wings.
A kind of amen.

And you, when you leave me,
will you drift or steer,
and which course,
past or future?
Why do we so wound the water
to move forward?
The wider the wake, the sooner it will disappear.

Philip Dacey's most recent collections of poems are *The Deathbed Playboy, The Paramour of the Moving Air,* and *What's Empty Weighs the Most: 24 Sonnets.*

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The True Embodiment of Everything That's Excellent

The Strange Adventure of Gilbert and Sullivan

STEPHEN JAY GOULD

On December 8, 1889, the day after the triumphant premiere of *The Gondoliers,* their last successful collaboration, W. S. Gilbert wrote to Sir Arthur Sullivan, in the generous tone so often expressed in his letters to his partner, despite the constant tension of their personal relationship: "I must again thank you for the magnificent work you have put into the piece. It gives one a chance of shining right through the 20th century with a reflected light." John Wellington Wells, the protagonist of their first successful full-length comic opera, *The Sorcerer,* may have been able to "prophesy with a wink of his eye, peep with security into futurity." But we usually don't ascribe similar skills to his literary progenitor.

Yet, with the success of Mike Leigh's *Topsy-Turvy*—a wondrous evocation of this complex partnership, the Victorian theatrical world, and the nature of creativity in general, all centered on the composition and first production of *The Mikado,* Gilbert and Sullivan's greatest and most enduring hit, in 1885—Gilbert's short note to Sullivan can only recall his initial characterization of Mr. Wells as "a very small prophet who brings us unbounded returns." For this film, opening in New York just a few days before our millennial transition, has already swept up a series of presti-

Stephen Jay Gould is the Alexander Agassiz Professor of Zoology and Professor of Geology at Harvard University, and Astor Visiting Professor of Biology at New York University. His most recent books are *Rocks of Ages, Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worms,* and *Questioning the Millennium.*

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gious awards, and surely marks the fulfillment of Gilbert's predictions for endurance to this very moment.

I must confess to a personal reason for pleasure in this renewed attention to the works of Gilbert and Sullivan—a baker's dozen of comic operas (the music to a fourteenth has been lost), now often dismissed as the silliest and fustiest of (barely) surviving Victorian oddments, and an embarrassment to anyone with modern intellectual pretensions. But I may now emerge from decades of (relative) silence to shout my confession that I love these pieces with all my heart, and that I even regard them as epitomes of absolute excellence for definable reasons that may help us to understand this most rare and elusive aspect of human potential.

In my latency, between the ages of ten and twelve, Gilbert and Sullivan became the passion of my life. I would save my nickels and dimes for several months until I accumulated the $6.66 needed to buy the old London recordings of each opera at Sam Goody's. I listened so often, with a pre-adolescent capacity for rote retention, that I learned every word and note of the corpus by pure imbibition, without a moment of conscious effort. (I could not expunge this information now, no matter how hard I might try, even though I can't remember anything learned last week—another anomaly and paradox of our mental lives.)

This phase ended, of course—and for the usual reasons. At thirteen, I watched Olivia de Havilland as Maid Marian (playing against Errol Flynn's Robin Hood, of course)—and the sight of her breasts through white satins focused and hardened my dawning recognition of fundamental change. (In one of the great fulfillments of my life, I met Miss de Havilland a few years ago, looking as beautiful as ever in the different manner of older age. I told her my story—although I confess that I left out the part about the breasts, rather than the whole persona, as my inspiration. She was very gracious; I was simply awestruck.) So I abandoned my intense love for Gilbert and Sullivan, but I have never lost my affection, or forgotten a jot or tittle of the writ.

I have thus lived, for several decades, in the ambiguity of many Savoyards: feeling a bit sheepish, even apologetic, given my vaunted status as a card-carrying intellectual, about my infatuation for this prototypical vestige of lowbrow entertainment imbued, at best, with middlebrow pretensions. Two major themes fueled my fear that this continued affection must represent a misplaced fealty to my own youth, based on a refusal to acknowledge that such unworthy flowers could seem glorious only before the realities of life spread like crabgrass through the splendor of adolescent turf.

First, some of Gilbert's texts do strike a modern audience as silly and forced—as in the seemingly endless punning on *orphan* vs. *often* in *The Pirates of Penzance,* though no worse, really, or longer for that matter, than the opening dialogue about cobbling in *Julius Caesar,* with its similar takes

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on *soul* vs. *sole* and *awl* vs. *all.* Perhaps the whole corpus never rises above such textual juvenility. Creeping doubt might then generate a corresponding fear that most of Sullivan's music, however witty and affecting to the Victorian ear, must now be downgraded as either mawkish (as in his "Lost Chord," once widely regarded as the greatest song ever written, but now forgotten), or pompous (as in his "Onward, Christian Soldiers").

Second, evidence of declining public attention might fuel these fears about quality. While scarcely extinct, or even moribund, Gilbert and Sullivan's works have retreated to a periphery of mostly amateur performance, spiced now and again by an acclaimed, but transient, professional foray, often in highly altered form (Joseph Papp's rock version of *The Pirates of Penzance,* or the revival of a favorite from the 1930s, the *Hot Mikado,* in the ultimate historical venue for terminations, Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C.). England's D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, Gilbert and Sullivan's original troupe, performed for more than one hundred years, but expired nearly two decades ago from a synergistic mixture of public indifference and embarrassingly poor performances. (The acronym and official title of America's best professional troupe—GASP for New York's Gilbert & Sullivan Players—surely acknowledges a loving commitment to an endangered species.)

And yet, despite occasional frissons of doubt, I have never credited these negative assessments, and I continue to believe that the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan prevailed over a vast graveyard of contemporary (and later) works—including the efforts of such truly talented composers as Herbert and Romberg—because they embody the elusive quality of absolute excellence, the goal of all our creative work, and the hardest of human attributes to nurture, or even to define.

Peter Rainer, reviewing *Topsy-Turvy* for *New York Magazine,* intended only praise when he wrote, "The beauty of Gilbert and Sullivan's art, which is also its mystery, is that, gloriously minor, it's more redolent and lasting than many works regarded as major." But we will never gain a decent understanding of excellence if we continue to use this standard distinction between major and minor forms of art as our primary taxonomic device.

We live in a fractal world, where scales that we choose to designate as major (a great tenor on the stage of La Scala) hold no intrinsically higher merit than those traditionally judged as vernacular or minor (a self-taught banjo player on a country porch). Each scale builds a corral of exactly the same shape to hold all progeny of its genre, and each corral reserves a tiny corner for its few products of absolute excellence. To continue this metaphor, a magnified photo of this corner for a "minor" art cannot be distinguished from the same corner for a "major" art seen through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. And if these two photos,

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mounted on a wall at the same scale, cannot be told apart, then we must seek a different criterion for judgment based on the common morphology of scale-independent excellence.

As a man with Darwinian training, I do admit a bias toward accepting long survival as the first rough criterion in our guidebook for identifying species of true excellence. I continue to regard as sagacious a childhood bet that I made with my brother, although he never paid up—that Beethoven would outlast the rock hit of that particular moment, "Roll Over Beethoven." But if we must set aside the spurious correlation of minor with transient and major with enduring, and then take the more radical step of rejecting the taxonomy of major vs. minor altogether, then the mystery surrounding the survival of Gilbert and Sullivan cannot be ascribed to the minor status of their chosen genre. And yet, the mystery remains, and even intensifies when thus stripped of its customary context. Why their work, and no others of the time? And if excellence be the common substrate of such endurance, how can we recognize this most elusive quality *before* the test of time provides a merely empirical confirmation?

Unless a creative person entirely abjures any ambition or desire to communicate his efforts to fellow human beings, then I suspect that all truly excellent works must exist simultaneously on two planes—and must be constructed (whether consciously or not) in such duality. I also confess to the elitist view that the novel and distinguishing aspect of excellent works will be fully accessible to very few consumers—initially, perhaps, to none at all.

Two factors restrict general access to this "higher" plane: the motivating concept may be novel beyond any power of contemporary comprehension ("ahead of its time" in a common but misleading phrase, for time marks no necessary incrementation of quality, and the first recorded human art, the 35,000-year-old cave paintings of Chauvet, matches Picasso at his best); or the virtuosity of execution may extend beyond the discriminatory powers of all but a very few viewers or listeners.

But, on the second, vernacular plane, excellent works must exude the potential to be felt as superior (albeit not fully known) by every consumer with sufficient dedication and experience to merit the title of "fan." A serious but untutored devotee of music in mid-eighteenth-century Leipzig should have been able to attend services at the Thomaskirche, hear the works of J. S. Bach, and recognize them as something weirdly, excruciatingly, and fascinatingly different from anything ever heard before. For the second criterion of virtuosity, a modern fan of opera might hear (as I did) Domingo, Voigt, and Salminen, under Levine and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, in the first act of *Die Walküre*—and just know, without being able to say why, that he had heard something surpassingly rare and transcendent.

I think that all geniuses "out of time"—if they do not give up or go mad—consciously construct their works on these two planes, one acces-

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sible to reasonably skilled aficionados of the moment, and one for Plato's realm (and for possible future comprehension). Thus, on the vernacular plane, Bach had to accept whatever reputation (and salary) he could muster in his own time and parochial place by becoming the premier organ virtuoso of his age (a vain annoyance to many who hated the bravado and loathed the encrusting of beloved tunes with such frills of improvisation, but a source of awe and respect for the relative cognoscenti). Moreover, since Bach composed in an age that had not yet formulated our modern concept of the individual genius as an innovator, we cannot even know how he understood his own uniqueness—beyond observing that this superiority had not escaped his notice. Then, on Plato's plane, Bach could write for the angels. And Darwin had to content himself with making an explicit division of his life's work into a comprehensible vernacular plane for all educated people (the factual basis of evolution) and a second plane that even his most dedicated supporters could not grasp in all its subtle complexity (the theory of natural selection, based on a radical philosophy that inverted all previous notions about the causes of organic history and design).

This problem of composition on two planes becomes even more explicit and severe for any artist working in a genre designated as "popular" in our peculiar taxonomies of human creativity. The master of an elite genre does not aim for widespread appeal in any case—so the vernacular plane of his duality already permits a great deal of rarefied complexity (and his second plane can then be as personal and as arcane as he desires). But the equal master of a popular genre must build his vernacular plane in a far more accessible place of significantly lesser complexity. How much higher, then, can his second plane ascend before the two levels lose all potential contact, and the work dissolves into incoherence?

Finally, I must preface my thoughts about Gilbert and Sullivan with one further and vital caveat. My confessed elitism remains entirely democratic—for structural rather than ethical reasons. (I happen to embrace the ethical reasons as well, but the structural claim embodies the premise that excellence cannot be achieved without such respect for the sensibility of consumers.) No person can achieve excellence in a popular genre without a rigorous and undeviating commitment to providing the very best (of personal competence, of course) at all times. At the first moment of compromise—the first "dumbing down" for "easier" or "wider" acceptability, the first boilerplating for reasons of simple weariness or an overcommitted schedule—one simply falls into the abyss. (I rarely speak so harshly, but I do believe that this particular gate remains so strait, and this special path so narrow.) Our conventional divisions between elite and popular genres bear no relationship whatever to any notion of absolute quality. This common distinction is purely sociological. Excellence remains as rare and as precious in either category. The pinnacle of supernal

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achievement holds no more DiMaggios to play center field than Domingos to inquire about the location of Wälse's sword.

And so, I simply submit that Gilbert and Sullivan have survived for the best and most defendable of all reasons: their work bears a unique stamp of excellence, best illustrated by its optimal and simultaneous functioning on both levels—on the vernacular plane by accessibility to all people who know and appreciate the genre (for these works tickle the funny bone, delight the muse of melody, and expose, in a gentle but incisive way, the conceits and foibles of all people and cultures); and on Plato's plane, by the most fiendishly clever union of music and versification ever accomplished in the English language. Moreover, since excellence demands both full respect and undivided attention to consumers at both levels, the uncanny genius of Gilbert and Sullivan rests largely upon their skill in serving these two audiences with (I must assume) a genuine affection for the different and equal merits of their product in both realms.

Sullivan has often been depicted as a man yearning to fulfill his supposed destiny as England's greatest classical composer since the immigrant Handel, or even the earlier native Purcell—a higher spirit tethered to a more earthly Gilbert only for practical and pecuniary reasons generated by the tables of Monte Carlo and other expensive vices. Part of his character (a rather small part, I suspect), abetted by the sanctimonious urgings of proper society (especially after Victoria dubbed him Sir Arthur, but left his partner as mere Mr. Gilbert), pulled him toward "serious" composition, but love beyond need, and a good nose for the locus of his own superior skills, led him to resist the blandishments of "higher" callings unsuited to his special gifts. (*Topsy-Turvy* catches this theme in a wordless, musical way simply by showing Sir Arthur's rapturous delight whenever he enters the Savoy pit to conduct his own scores.)

Gilbert, though often, and wrongly, cast as an acerbic martinet, came to better personal terms with the genre favored by his own muse. He supervised every detail of staging and rehearsed his performers to the point of exhaustion. But they honored his fierce commitment and gave him all their loyalty, because they also knew his unfailing respect for their professionalism. Flaccid concord does not build an optimal foundation for surpassing achievement in any case.

The need to be excellent on two parallel planes has always posed special problems for artists who work in the genres of mass entertainment—even more so today (when the least common denominator for general appeal stands so low) than in Gilbert and Sullivan's time, when Shakespearean references, and even a Latin quip or two, might work on the vernacular plane. Chuck Jones, the guiding spirit behind Bugs Bunny and his pals, holds first prize for the twentieth century, but Walt Disney, at his best, set the standard for works that function, without any contradiction or compromise, both as inoffensive sweetness for innocent children,

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and as mordant and sardonic commentaries, informed by immense technical skill in animation, for sophisticated adults.

Pinocchio must rank as the first masterpiece in this antic style of dual entertainment. But Disney then lost the way (probably in a conscious and politically motivated decision), as saccharine commercialism, replete with pandering that precluded excellence at either level, enveloped most of his studio's work. But another recent film, opening just a month before *Topsy-Turvy,* rediscovered this elusive path: *Toy Story II,* a sweet fable with brilliant animation for kids, and a rather dark, though still comic, tale for adults about life in a world of Scylla and Charybdis, with no real pathway between (leading to the ultimate existential message of "just keep on truckin'"). Our hero, a "collectible" cowboy modeled on an early TV star, must either stay with the boy who now loves him, and resign himself to eventual residence and dismemberment on the scrap heap, or go with his fellow TV buddies, whom he has just met in joyous discovery, to permanent display in Japan—that is, to immortality in the antisepsis of a glass display case.

I can claim only amateur status as an exegete of Gilbert and Sullivan, but I can offer a personal testimony that may help to elucidate these two necessary planes of excellence. My first book, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny,* traced the history of biological views on the relationship between embryological development and evolutionary change—and I remain committed to the principle that systematic alterations during a lifespan often mirror either a historical sequence or a stable hierarchy of fully developed forms at rising levels of complexity in our current world.

As I stated at the outset, I fell in love with Gilbert and Sullivan at a tender age, and imbibed all the words and music before I could possibly understand their full context and meaning. I therefore, and invariably, enjoy a bizarre and exhilarating, if mildly unsettling, experience every time I attend a performance today. An old joke, based on an ethnic stereotype, that may pass muster as a mock on a privileged group in an age of political correctness, asks why the dour citizens of Switzerland often burst into inappropriate laughter during solemn moments at Sunday church services: "When they get the jokes they heard at Saturday night's party." Similar experiences attend my current Sundays with Gilbert and Sullivan, although my delays between hearing and comprehension extend to forty years or more!

I know all the words by childhood rote, but I couldn't comprehend their full cleverness at the time of implantation. Thus, I carry the text like an idiot savant—with full accuracy and limited understanding because, although now fully capable, I make no conscious effort to ponder or analyze the sacred writ during my daily life. But, whenever I attend a performance, I enjoy at least one "Swiss moment" when I listen with an adult ear and suddenly experience a jolt that can only induce an enor-

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mous grin for exposing human folly by personal example: "Oh, yes, of course, how stupid of me. So that's what these words, which I have known and recited nearly all my conscious life, actually mean."

At this point I must highlight an aspect of this argument that I had hoped to elucidate en passant, and without such overt pedantry. But I have failed in all efforts to achieve this end and had best bite the bullet of embarrassing explicitness. I do, indeed, intend this primary comparison between, on the one hand, the vernacular vs. Plato's plane as two necessary forms of excellence and, on the other, my differing styles of childhood and adult affection for Gilbert and Sullivan. But I am, most emphatically, not arguing that the vernacular plane bears any legitimate analogy to any of the conventional descriptions of childhood as primitive, undeveloped, lesser, unformed, or even unsophisticated.

(If I really thought, in any conscious part of my being, that the vernacular character of my "popular" writings on science implied any disrespect for my audience or any adulteration of my content, I could not proceed, because excellence would then lie beyond my grasp by inherent definition—and my personal quest for the two planes of this goal provides my strongest conscious motivation for this aspect of my career. Good popular writing in science resides proudly upon an honored branch of our humanistic tradition, extending back to Galileo's composition of both his great books as accessible and witty dialogues in Italian, not as abstract treatises in Latin, and to Darwin's presentation of the *Origin of Species* as a book for all educated readers.)

I compare childhood's love with the vernacular plane of excellence only because both base their accurate perception and discernment upon the immediacy of unanalyzed attraction—and many forms of our highest achievement do lie beyond words, or even beyond conscious formulation, in a realm of "knowing that" rather than "stating why." For example, I first saw Joe DiMaggio play when I was eight years old, but already a reasonably knowledgeable fan of the game. I knew, with certainty, that his play and presence surpassed all others. But I had probably never even heard the word *grace,* and I surely could not formulate any concept of excellence.

Thus, I know that Gilbert and Sullivan fulfill excellence's primary criterion of full and simultaneous operation on two planes because I have experienced them both, but sequentially, during my own life—and this temporal separation permits me to untangle the different appeals. Some intrusions of adult understanding upon childhood's rote strike me as simply funny, not particularly illustrative of anything about excellence, but worth mentioning to set a context and to potentiate my full confession. Failure to understand does not inhibit—and may actually abet—rote memorization or unconscious infusion.

One silly example: I recently attended a performance of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and had my Swiss moment during Josephine's aria, as she wrestles

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with the dilemma of following her true love for a poor sailor or making an advantageous union with Sir Joseph Porter, the "Ruler of the Queen's Navee." She sings of her true love, Ralph Rackstraw: "No golden rank can he impart— / No wealth of house or land— / No fortune save his trusty heart . . . " And the proverbial lightbulb finally illuminated my brain. I did not know the meaning of *save* as *except* at age eleven. At that time, I remember wondering how fortune could "rescue" Ralph's admirable ticker—but I never resolved the line, and didn't revisit the matter for forty-five years.

Some little examples in this mode even prove embarrassing, and therefore ever so salutary in the service of humility for arrogant intellectuals. In *Iolanthe,* for example, The Lord Chancellor berates himself for mistaking a powerful fairy queen for an insignificant schoolmarm:

A plague on this vagary,
I'm in a nice quandary!
  Of hasty tone
  With dames unknown
I ought to be more chary;
It seems that she's a fairy
From Andersen's libr*a*ry,
  And I took her for
  The proprietor
Of a Ladies' Seminary!

Now, and obviously on the second plane, part of Gilbert's literary joke lies in his conscious distortion of words to force rhymes with others that we properly stress on the penultimate syllable—especially "fairy," the key to the entire verse. But I didn't know the correct versions behind most of these distortions—and I pronounced "vagary" on the second syllable, thus exposing my pretentiousness, until a bit of auditory dissonance led me to a dictionary only about ten years ago!

As operative examples of the two planes—and of Gilbert and Sullivan's achievement of excellence through their unparalleled success in both domains, without disrespect for the vernacular, or preciousness on the upper level—consider these Swiss moments of my sequential experiences in music and text. I have relished my unanalyzed vernacular pleasure all my life, but I now appreciate the surpassingly rare quality of these works all the more because, in my maturity, I have added a few glimpses of the depth and uniqueness of their dual representation.

Sullivan, to cite some examples in just one aspect of his efforts on the second plane, had mastered all major forms of the classical repertory. He especially appreciated the English roots and versions of certain styles.

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Nothing can surpass his elegant Handelian parody in *Princess Ida,* when the three irredeemably stupid sons of King Gama seek freedom from formal restriction before a battle by removing their armor, piece by piece, as Arac intones his formal melody to the graceful accompaniment of strings alone ("This helmet, I suppose, was meant to ward off blows"). And, in the same work, Sullivan took the ultimate risk, and showed his genuine mastery, when he wrote a truly operatic aria of real quality ("Oh goddess wise") to accompany Gilbert's delicious spoof of Ida's serious pretensions. Durward Lely, who played Cyril in the original production (and who holds an important role in *Topsy-Turvy*), said of this aria: "As an example of mock heroics it seems to me unsurpassable." The composer, in modern parlance, really had balls.

Whenever Sullivan wrote his parodies of classical forms, he did so for a wickedly funny, and devastatingly appropriate, dramatic reason. But his device must remain inaccessible unless one knows the musical style behind Sullivan's tread on the higher plane. Still, the songs work wonderfully on the vernacular plane, even when a listener cannot grasp the intended musical joke because he does not know the classical form under parody. This I can assert with certainty, albeit for a limited domain, because I loved and somehow caught the "specialness" of the following two songs in my youth, but didn't learn about the musical forms (and thus recognize the parody) until my adult years—and even then didn't understand the intended contextual joke until a much later Swiss moment.

Even at age ten, I would have identified the trio ("A British tar is a soaring soul") as my favorite song from Act I of *Pinafore.* I knew that Gilbert's text described this song as a "glee," but I knew no meaning for the word besides "mirth," and therefore did not recognize his citation of a genre of unaccompanied part-songs for three or more male voices, especially popular in eighteenth-century England (and the source of the term *glee club,* still used to describe some amateur singing groups).

At an intermediary stage toward the second plane, I did recognize the song as a perfectly composed glee in the old style, including its a cappella setting of the two stanzas for Ralph Rackstraw, the Boatswain and the Boatswain's Mate. But I got the joke only a few years ago. Sir Joseph Porter gives three copies of the song to Ralph, claiming that he wrote the ditty himself "to encourage independence of thought and action in the lower branches of the service." The three men start to perform the unfamiliar piece by singing at sight from Sir Joseph's score. They begin, and manage to continue for an entire verse of four lines, in perfect homophony—Sir Joseph's obvious intention for the entire piece. But, as simple sailors after all, these men have little experience in sight singing, and the poor Boatswain's Mate soon falls behind the others. The second verse of four lines therefore "devolves" into an elegant, if mock, polyphonic texture—that is, a part-song, a perfect and literal glee (made all

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the more absurd in fulfilling, by this "imperfection," Sir Joseph's stated intention to encourage independence among his men).

(I am confident that I have caught Sullivan's intent aright, but I remain surprised by how often modern directors don't seem to get the point, or don't choose to honor the potential understanding of at least some folks in their audience. Only twice, in about ten performances, have I seen the song performed by sailors holding the scores, with the Boatswain's Mate becoming frustrated as he falls behind. Why not honor Sullivan's theatrical instincts, and his lovely, if relatively sophisticated, musical joke? The piece, and the humor in the polyphonic discombobulation, works perfectly well even for listeners who experience only the vernacular plane—for this dual operation, with full respect accorded to both planes, expresses the sine qua non of excellence.)

The madrigal (so identified) from *The Mikado* ("Brightly dawns our wedding day") exploits a similar device. Yum-Yum prepares for her wedding with Nanki-Poo, but under the slight "drawback" that her husband must be beheaded in a month. The four singers, including the bride and bridegroom, try to cheer themselves up through the two verses of this perfect madrigal, or four-part song in alternating homophonic and polyphonic sections. They start optimistically ("joyous hour we give thee greeting") but cannot sustain the mood ("all must sip the cup of sorrow"), despite the words that close both verses ("sing a merry madrigal, fal-la").

To get the full joke, one must recognize the rigidly formal and unvarying texture of the musical genre—thus setting a contrast with the singers' progressive decline into textual gloom and actual tears. Gilbert made his quartet stand rigidly still throughout the piece, as if declaiming their ancient madrigal in a formal concert hall—thus emphasizing the almost antic contrast of constant and stylish form with feelings of growing despair. In this case, I sense that most modern directors grasp the intended point, but suspect that so few listeners now know the musical language and definition of a madrigal that the contrast between form and feeling must be reinforced by some other device. I do not object to such modernization, which clearly respects authorial intent, but I feel that directors have acquitted their proper intuition with varying degrees of success.

My vote for last place goes to Jonathan Miller's otherwise wonderful resetting at an English seaside resort. (As Gilbert's central joke, after all, *The Mikado*'s Japanese setting is a sham, for each character plays an English stock figure thinly disguised in Oriental garb—the ineffably polite upper-class Mikado, who boils his victims in oil but invites them to tea before their execution; his wastrel son; the phony noble pretender who will do any job for a price, and who gave his name, Pooh-Bah, to men of such multiple deeds and salaries, etc.) Miller's quartet sings the madrigal stock-still, in true Gilbertian fashion, while workmen ply their tools and move their ladders about the set to emphasize the key contrast. A decent

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concept, perhaps, but Sullivan never wrote a more beautiful song than this madrigal, and you can't hear a note amidst the distractions and actual clatter of the workmen's movements. Pure kudos, on the other end, to Canada's Stratford Company. They recognized that most of the audience would not draw, from the song itself, the essential contrast between structured form and dissolving emotion—so they set the singers in the midst of a formal Japanese tea ceremony to transfer the musical point to visual imagery that no one could miss, and without disrupting the music either visually or aurally.

I have thus grown to appreciate Sullivan more and more over the years, but I still lean to the view, probably held by a majority of Savoyards, that Gilbert's text must be counted as more essential to their joint survival. (Gilbert might have found another collaborator of passable talent, though no one could have matched Sullivan; but Sir Arthur would surely have gone the way of Victor Herbert, despite his maximal musical quality, without Gilbert's texts.) My Swiss moments with Gilbert therefore bring me even greater pleasure and make me wonder how much we have all missed. Gilbert's texts celebrate the talent of a man who truly loved his vernacular art, but did not debase or demean these accomplishments one whit by lacing his work with innumerable gestures and complexities that few may grasp, but that never interfere with the vernacular flow.

As a small example of Gilbert's care, I don't know how many hundred times I have heard the duet between Captain Corcoran and Little Buttercup at the beginning of *Pinafore*'s Act II. Buttercup hints at a secret that, when revealed, will fundamentally change the Captain's status. (We later learn, in the classic example of Gilbertian topsy-turvy, that Buttercup, as the Captain's nursemaid "a many years ago," accidentally switched him with another baby in her charge—who just happens to be none other than Ralph Rackstraw, now revealed as nobly born, and therefore fit to marry the Captain's now-demoted daughter after all.) The song, as I knew even from day one at age ten, presents a list of rhyming proverbs shrouded in mystery. But I never discerned the textual strategy until my Swiss moment just a few months ago.

I suppose I always recognized that Buttercup's proverbs all refer to masquerades and changes of status, as she hints to the Captain:

> Black sheep dwell in every fold;
> All that glitters is not gold;
> Storks turn out to be but logs;
> Bulls are but inflated frogs.

But I never grasped the structure of Captain Corcoran's response. He admits right up front that Buttercup's warnings confuse him: "I don't see

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at what you're driving, mystic lady." He then parries her proverbizing, supposedly in kind, at least according to his understanding:

> Though I'm anything but clever,
> I could talk like that forever:

I claim no profundity for Gilbert in this case, but his simple device does express the clever, consummate craftsmanship, and the unvarying intelligence, that pervades all his texts. The Captain also lists his proverbs in rhymed couplets. But each of his pairs includes two proverbs of *opposite* import, thus intensifying the character of the Captain's befuddlement:

> Once a cat was killed by care;
> Only brave deserve the fair. . . .
> Wink is often good as nod;
> Spoils the child who spares the rod;

(Just to be sure that I had not been displaying unique opacity during all these years of incomprehension, I asked four friends of reasonable intelligence and good Gilbertian knowledge—and not a one had ever recognized the structure behind the Captain's puzzlement.)

To cite one more example of Gilbert's structural care and complexity, the finale to Act I of *Ruddigore* begins with three verses, each sung by a different group of characters with a different set of feelings about unfolding events. (In this Gilbertian parody of theatrical melodrama, Robin Oakapple has just been exposed as the infamous Ruthven Murgatroyd, Baronet of Ruddigore, condemned by a witch's curse to commit at least one crime each day. This exposure frees his younger brother Despard, who had borne the title and curse while his big brother lived on the lam, but who may now reform to a desired life of calm virtue. Meanwhile, Richard Dauntless, Ruthven's foster brother and betrayer, fulfills the intent of his dastardly deed by wresting the lovely Rose Maybud from his brother and then winning her affection on an instant rebound.)

Each of the three groups proclaims a happiness that surpasses a particular set of metaphorical comparisons. But I had never dissected the structure of Gilbert's imagery, and one verse had left me entirely confused—until another Swiss moment at a recent performance. The eager young lovers, Richard and Rose, just united by Richard's betrayal, begin by proclaiming that their own joy surpasses several organic images of immediate fulfillment:

> Oh, happy the lily
> When kissed by the bee; . . .
> And happy the filly
> That neighs in her pride;

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Despard and his lover Margaret, now free to pursue their future virtue, then confess to happiness beyond several natural examples of delayed gratification:

Oh, happy the flowers
That blossom in June,
And happy the bowers
That gain by the boon,

But the lines of the final group had simply puzzled me:

Oh, happy the blossom
That blooms on the lea,
Likewise the opossum
That sits on a tree,

Why cite a peculiar marsupial living far away in the Americas, except to cadge a rhyme? And what relevance to *Ruddigore* can a flower on a meadow represent? I resolved Gilbert's intent only when I looked up *lea*—what do we city boys know?—and learned one of its meanings as an arable field temporarily sown with grass for grazing. Thus, the verse cites two natural images of items far and uncomfortably out of place—an irrelevant opossum in distant America, and a lone flower in a sea of grass. The three singers of this verse have all been cast adrift, or made superfluous, by actions beyond their control—for Hannah, Rose's aunt and caretaker, must now live alone; Zorah, who also fancied Richard, has lost her love; and Adam, Robin's good and faithful manservant, must now become the scheming accomplice of the criminalized and rechristened Ruthven.

Finally, I recognized the structure of the entire piece as a progressive descent from immediate and sensual joy into misery—from Rose and Richard's current raptures; to Despard and Margaret's future pleasures; to the revised status of Hannah, Zorah, and Adam as mere onlookers; to the final verse, sung by Ruthven alone, and proclaiming the wretchedness of his new criminal role—not better than the stated images (as in all previous verses), but worse:

Oh, wretched the debtor
Who's signing a deed!
And wretched the letter
That no one can read!

For Ruthven cites only images of impotence, but he must become an active criminal:

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But very much better
    Their lot it must be
Than that of the person
I'm making this verse on,
Whose head there's a curse on—
    Alluding to me!

In this case, moreover, we may compare Gilbert with the medieval cathedral builders who placed statues in rooftop positions visible only to God, and therefore not subject to any human discernment or approbation. For these verses rush by with such speed, within so dense an orchestral accompaniment, and surrounded by so much verbiage for the full chorus, that no one can hear all the words in any case. Hadn't Gilbert, after all, ended the patter trio in *Ruddigore*'s second act by recognizing that all artists must, on occasion, puncture their own bubbles or perish in a bloat of pride?

This particularly rapid, unintelligible patter
Isn't generally heard, and if it is it doesn't matter!

Mr. Justice Stewart famously claimed, in true (if unintended) Gilbertian fashion, that he might not be able to define pornography, but that he surely knew the elusive product when he saw it. I don't know that we can reach any better consensus about the orthogonal, if not opposite, phenomenon of excellence, but my vernacular plane knows, while my limited insight into Plato's plane can only glimpse from afar (and through a dark glass), that Gilbert and Sullivan have passed through this particular gate of our mental construction, and that their current enthusiasts need never apologize for loving such apparent trifles, truly constructed as pearls beyond price.

Ko-Ko, to win Katisha's hand and save his own neck, wove a tragically affecting tale about a little bird who drowned himself because blighted love had broken his heart. But Ko-Ko spun his entire story—the point of Gilbert's humor in Sullivan's wonderfully sentimental song—on the slightest of evidentiary webs, for the bird spoke but a single mysterious word, reiterated in each verse: "titwillow." Even the most trifling materials in our panoply of forms can, in the right hands, become clothed in the magic of excellence.

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Ears

RICHARD FROST

All drummers suffer hearing loss,
my hearing doctor yells.
But don't quit if you live that way,
or if you love it. Bells

of bass horns, trumpets, flügelhorns,
slide and valve trombones
close to you impair your ears.
They warp the little bones

and hairs inside your pounded head.
The organ that's excited
by the deepest pedal notes
is damaged while delighted.

But worse by far than all that noise
are the slaps and blams and blums
and rattles of a set of skins
near a drummer's own eardrums.

Yet, as I said before, don't quit.
This miniature device
almost unseen inside each ear
can make the world sound nice

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and clear again; and if you live
by ruining your ears,
you simply turn the volume up
as total deafness nears.

Don't quit the drums, don't think of it.
I watch him mouth those words,
and march out to a world regaled
by silent winds and birds,

to my mumbling family and friends,
to a softly slamming shut
doorway to my listening brain.
What? I say. *What? . . . What?*

Richard Frost teaches at the State University College, Oneonta, New York. His poems have appeared in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR since 1974. His most recent poetry collection is *Neighbor Blood*.

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The Poet's Voice

MICHAEL S. HARPER

love, light, loss, liberty, lunacy and laceration
—Gwendolyn Brooks

Too much made of birth in Topeka
too little made of Chicago *Defender*

contributor at sixteen, the odd job
solo moments of community gloss

in each kitchenette clipping
microscopic *tintypes* of losses and gains

without the slightest naivete
of the street, backyard, parlor grid

her masterpiece of the 'singing tree'
"We Real Cool" in 1959

anticipates the rest of the century:
after Fisk in 1967

known by detractors and sychophants
alike as "Mother Afrika"

but she remains a *citizen* in daily
interiors of unassailable synapse

contralto arpeggios released
in bemused attributes of light

at the end of her *lincoln west* tunnel
wordsmith of the 'real thing'

exhortingly brave in every territory
for those unsung-in-service-evermore

(for Gwendolyn Brooks on her 82nd birthday: 6.7.99)

Michael S. Harper is University Professor and Professor of English at Brown. He is co-editor, with Anthony Walton, of *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry*. His *Songlines in Michaeltree* (University of Illinois Press) will appear in May of this year.

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Cut Time

Four-Handed Études for Boxers

CARLO ROTELLA

Russell, a pleasant young man who split his time between the college on the hill (where I taught) and the boxing gym down below, came up at the end of class one day to tell me that a card of fights would be held in a couple of weeks in nearby Allentown, Pennsylvania. He knew I was interested in boxing and thought I might like to go; also, he needed a ride.

I had figured he was not stopping by to continue our discussion of "Bartleby the Scrivener." Seated front and center, in a posture of polite interest but not taking many notes, Russell followed the action in class without committing to it. Some students, infighters, sit up front to get your attention, but others do it for the opposite reason: one way to avoid getting hit is to get in too close, nestled cozily against your opponent's clavicle, where he cannot apply the leverage to hurt you (unless he fouls by head-butting, ear-biting, or calling on people who do not raise their hands). Russell did the reading and wrote his papers, but he was not swept up by fictions and make-believe characters. The class met in the afternoon just before he headed down the hill to the Larry Holmes Training Center, and I suspected that he daydreamed about the imminent shock of punching rather than concentrating on the literary matters at hand.

Every once in a while, though, Russell would say something that reminded me that he was paying attention. Impressed by Frederick Douglass's late-round TKO of the overseer Covey, he spoke up to remind us that this scene dramatized the red-blooded ideal of self-making with one's

Carlo Rotella is Assistant Professor of English at Boston College. He has published essays in *Critical Inquiry*, *DoubleTake*, *Harper's*, *Transition*, and the *Washington Post Magazine*, and is the author of *October Cities*, a study of urban literature.

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own two hands. But he had also been moved to speak by Melville's Bartleby, who comprehensively rejects one of the fight world's foundational principles: protect yourself at all times. Russell, breaking form, had his hand up first and initiated the discussion of Bartleby with references to Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and the difficult principle of moral inaction. Russell encouraged us to consider whether the pacific Bartleby, by preferring to do nothing, was acting decisively against the grain of his situation, or was simply not much good with his hands and therefore destined to be acted upon by a world that kept the hard knocks coming in a steady stream. At least that is what I took him to mean, and I got busy parlaying it into a general discussion in which Russell, having said his piece, declined to participate further.

Once the other students had risen to the bait and were doing the talking, I had a chance to look Russell over for new damage: this week it was a thick, dark line, resembling lavishly applied lampblack, that ran under his right eye from nose to cheekbone. Another black eye, and this one a prizewinner. One of the quiet dramas of having Russell in class was seeing what kind of punishment he had incurred of late. He was so placid in his manner, so Bartleby-like in his pale decency, that I was always jarred by the various lumps, welts, and bruises that passed over his face like weather fronts. Having seen him spar in the gym, I should not have been surprised. He was strong but not quick, and he came straight at his antagonist, equably accepting blows as the price of getting into range to deliver the one-twos he favored. I knew that Russell's style ensured that he would get hit often, even on his best days, but when I saw the marks of his latest lesson on his face, a little click of alarmed recognition still ran through me—registering somewhere in a roped-off area of my mind devoted to boxing—as I managed the discussion and scrawled on the blackboard, chalk dust all over my hands and on the thighs of my pants where I wiped them.

I gestured at the new black eye when Russell stopped to talk with me after class. He just said, "Sterling," looked at the floor, and shook his head, smiling faintly. Sterling was one of the gym's rising stars, a teenager already poised and smooth in the ring. Russell had several years and a few pounds on Sterling, although neither advantage did him much good. Sterling was so preternaturally fast and clever that he had fallen half in love with the idea of his own genius; that—and a tendency to switch back and forth too promiscuously between right- and left-handed stances in order to baffle his opponents—was his only evident weakness. He was the kind of evasive, willowy counterpuncher that solid hitters long to pummel. Russell, for one, believed with doctrinaire intensity that he could hurt Sterling if only he could catch him. I had not seen the two of them spar together, but I had seen Russell's face after their sessions and I had seen both of them spar with others, so I could imagine the encounters:

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Russell following Sterling doggedly around the ring, absorbing jabs and the occasional speed-blurred combination as he sought to fix the skinny body and weaving head in his sights long enough to throw a meaningful punch. When Russell drifted far away in thought during class, I assumed he was pursuing Sterling in his mind's eye in the hope of finally nailing him with a big right hand.

On our drive down to the fights later that month, Russell described himself as discouraged about boxing. He had been scheduled to make his first amateur fight in the Golden Gloves, but he had canceled it. He knew he was not ready. I asked if Sterling was still beating him up in the sparring ring, and he said, "Well, yeah, him, but also everybody else. A while ago I was walking around with two black eyes and loose cartilage in my nose and I started to get . . . *discouraged* thinking about it." Russell's stated ambition was to win an official boxing match, not just to spar or fight creditably, but the accumulating pain and damage made him worry that he might be foolish to pursue this goal any further. At the same time, he was wary of giving up too easily, of mistaking for perpetual futility what might be only a difficult period in his fistic education. He said, "When I spar I'm getting really beat up, like, humiliated, in there. I can't get better until I practice more, but I can't practice without getting beat up." I asked why he could not stop now, with no significant damage done, having learned the basics of boxing, having done much to inculcate in himself the generally applicable virtue of disciplined hard work, and having absorbed an instructive dose of the kind of violent extremity from which college usually shelters a young man or woman.

Russell had two answers to that. First, the ever-present threat of pain and humiliation in boxing inspired him to rigor in his training, and he worried that if he stopped going to the gym he would backslide in other endeavors that also required discipline. "When I first got to college," he said, "I slacked off a lot, just hung out and messed around, and it really affected me—my school work, my life. But once I found boxing, I got disciplined about everything. School, eating, sleeping, everything. This week I was getting really discouraged and I didn't go down to the gym at all, and I already felt myself letting things go. You know, falling back into bad habits." Second, he said, discipline aside, "It could turn out that pain and damage are important just by themselves. That's a kind of life experience you can't get as a middle-class college student. Maybe it's worth getting banged up to learn about yourself and, you know, the rest of the world." There were guys down at the gym who had been in jail, who had been addicted to drugs, who had given and taken beatings in and out of the ring, who had been out on the streets broke and without prospects. That was what Russell meant by "life experience."

He seemed to want an argument, so I gave him one. Boxing was not

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the only way to sample the world beyond College Hill. Most experience of that world fell somewhere between the extremes of reading about it in books and insisting on getting punched out over and over by experts. Warming to the task, I argued that his fixation on getting hurt as the key to authentic "life experience" took the school out of the school of hard knocks, reducing an education in pugilism to an elaborate form of self-abuse. If ritual humiliation and physical damage became his antidote to slacking off and a sheltered upbringing, wouldn't that formula for gaining "life experience" give him no reason to improve as a boxer? And, anyway, what made boxing necessarily a better path to "life experience" than college? Wasn't college, ideally, supposed to be about exactly the things he saw in boxing: rigorous self-knowledge, encounters with the wider world, the inculcation of discipline? After all, Frederick Douglass presents himself as a student first and a wordsmith last—a reader, writer, and speaker. He disdains boxing, like whiskey-drinking, as a waste of a Sabbath day better spent in learning to read, and he fights only twice—when cornered, rather than going in search of beatings—in a definitively unsheltered life.

Russell said "I see that" and "Right, right" in the way a person does when he means that he has stated his position, he is pleased that you agree it is worth discussing, and there is nothing more to discuss.

We were on our way to see Art Baylis, who also worked out at the Larry Holmes Training Center, fight on the evening's card. Art was getting old in fighter-years. Sometimes in the gym, wrapping his hands before he got to work, he would complain, "I'm tired of this bullshit. I'm not making money, I'm getting all beat up for nothing." The other fighters were sympathetic: it's a rough business, they would agree, nobody here is getting rich. (Actually, Larry Holmes, the heavyweight ex-champion who owned the gym, had been rich for some time, but that was different.) Some tried to jolly Art out of his dark moods, but he would say, "Don't tell me I'm not tired," and they let him be, exchanging smiles behind his back. They knew he would return the next day, or the day after that. Art fought for small purses and worked as a sparring partner for more accomplished veteran fighters or younger men on the way up, men with some money behind them. When he sparred he sometimes wore not just the standard headgear but a mask, a simultaneously futuristic- and medieval-looking helmet made of bright red cushiony material mounted on a rigid frame that fit over his whole head. It had two slits at the eyes and projected out, beaklike, over his nose, mouth, and jaw. He had been cut up over the years and there was no reason to open old wounds in the gym.

Art had turned pro relatively late, in his mid-twenties, and there were gaps in his record, periods of a year and three years in which he had not

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fought at all. There was talk of a stretch in the joint and a drug problem that had undercut his development as a fighter. A small, competent heavyweight who also fought as a cruiserweight, he was still solid in the legs. Shirtless, though, he did not look like God in a painting. His chest drooped, unlike those broad armor-plate pectorals proudly sported by men drawn obsessively to the bench press. People who run and lift weights to get buff, who are "into sports" and speak of "intimidation" and "dominating," might make the mistake of thinking Art was soft and could be overwhelmed by a younger man in better shape. Art knew better. He did best fighting anatomically impressive whippersnappers whose principal investment was in their bodies rather than their craft, men who had the advantage of him *only* in youth and physique. Except when he was chosen as a plausible opponent to lose a fight to a hot property, he was past the point in his career at which he might find himself matched regularly in bouts against genuine talents.

Art was not necessarily quicker or more gifted than the men he beat. Rather, he knew how to fight and had few expectations of glorious success to interfere with his capacity to endure hard times. He had won enough fights to know what it felt like to outlast the other man, but he had been beaten up often enough to know what a well-crafted beating should feel like. He knew the difference between that and a couple of rounds of rough treatment at the hands of an opponent who will soon have overextended himself in the flush of what feels like incipient triumph. Typically, Art lost or split the early rounds, throwing his left jab and hook to the head, holding his right hand in reserve, and weathering the other guy's best shots. After a couple of rounds of this, once both men had spent the first increments of energy and were taking stock of what remained, just about the time when a younger man had begun to realize with some distress that he was tired and there was still a day's work to do, Art settled in to win the fight: he began hammering the body with both hands to slow his opponent down and discourage further offense, then went upstairs to the head. When Art won, it was usually by decision rather than knockout.

Some of the victories came easy, most came hard. On the night Russell and I went to see him fight in the ballroom of the Days Inn in Allentown, Art got cut badly in the second round. The other fighter, Exum Speight, was a professional opponent, considerably younger than Art but with more fights and many more losses on his record. The matchmaker had chosen Speight with the expectation that Art would defeat him, but not without a crowd-pleasing struggle. Although Speight rarely won a bout anymore, he had gone the distance with some of the best in the business and he looked the part of a tough guy. While Art's size and strength resided in his thick legs, Speight's was in his upper body: bulky shoulders, prominent veins branching across biceps and forearms, a strongbox

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of a chest. Speight came out briskly, circling first one way and then the other, firing punches in a commanding rhythm. Art followed him around the ring, eating jabs and throwing left jabs and hooks of his own, looking for an opening to deliver the right. Perhaps because Speight was acting like a man who expected to win, and seemed unaffected by the older man's punches, Art forgot himself. He became impatient and tried his right hand too early, before the younger man's force had been sufficiently denatured by frustration, fatigue, and punishment. Art loaded up leverage to throw a right at the head through what looked like a gap in his opponent's defense, but Speight sensed Art's balance shifting and beat him to the punch. Speight snapped his low-riding left hand up and around to deliver the best blow of the night, a crisp hook that interrupted Art's own slower-developing punch and landed flush to the right side of Art's face. There was old, soft, much-torn scar tissue around the outside corner of Art's right eye, the kind that parts like wet paper when force is applied to it. Blood came up enthusiastically out of the mess, a rich, awful, seductive red under the ring lights. Within seconds it was running down Art's face, getting all over his chest and Speight's gloves, then Art's own gloves and both fighters' trunks. Art's white trunks began to turn pink.

A serious cut seems to change everything. I think of it as making a sound one can almost hear, a droning, keening note that hangs in the smoke-filled air of fight night. The almost-sound is like music played in a difficult, awkward scale and time signature. When blood from a serious cut finds its way into the lights, it is as if some sinister bandleader, black-suited and Fu Manchu'd behind his horn, has cued a frantic, dissonant foray into cut time. The almost-music of cut time strums the optic nerves, vibrates in the teeth; it encourages fighters to do urgent, sometimes desperate things. Spectators, too, shamed and fascinated, plunge headlong into this alien-familiar moment. What was inside and hidden, implicit in the fight, has come outside and taken form.

Art grabbed Speight as often as he could and held him, hoping to make it through the rest of the second round without further damage. To shield the cut, Art put the uncut left side of his face against the left side of Speight's and kept it there in the clinches, which created the illusion that Art was searching the crowd for someone over Speight's shoulder. Unhinged by cut time, I imagined for one bizarre moment that he was trying to make eye contact with me (at ringside) and Russell (back in the crowd somewhere) in order to call on us. "See? 'Life experience.' Discuss." A great slick of fresh blood covered the right side of Art's face, which was stretched into a desperate-looking grimace. It was hard not to believe that he was silently entreating us, the referee—anybody—to stop the fight. But of course he was doing no such thing. Art had an education, not only in fighting but in being hurt, that made the cut a problem to solve. He had

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to negotiate the difficulties of cut time while conducting the fight back into more manageable form—a twelve-round blues, say, or the stately largo movement of a concerto that had begun at far too brisk an allegro. He had sprung a leak and he needed to fix it.

Art bled and bled. The ring doctor visited his corner between rounds to inspect the damage. Art's seconds, seasoned practitioners who had worked more illustrious corners in the past, stanched the flow as well as they could, but the cut opened anew as soon as Speight started hitting it in the next round. Art knew he was in danger and picked up the pace, throwing wilder punches with both hands in the hope of hurting his man before the cut would oblige the ring doctor to end the fight. Driven out of his customarily measured boxing style, Art began to make a sobbing, effortful noise as he threw outsized blows. Most of them missed, which caused him to sob more dramatically as he expended even more energy to regain his balance after every staggering miss, but some of his blows hit Speight's guard or landed glancingly on the chin or body. There were so many of them that Speight, instead of counterpunching in earnest to make Art pay for exposing himself so rashly, changed tactics and waited for the older man to run out of steam. Speight made a fort out of his forearms and gloves, risking only an occasional sortie to throw a punch in the lulls between Art's assaults. This went on for another three rounds. Art's blood splattered both fighters, the canvas underfoot, and the judges, functionaries, and reporters at ringside. A slick-haired guy from the boxing commission, seated a few places down from me at the long table abutting the ring apron, pulled up the white tablecloth and tented it over himself to the eyes. Perhaps he was squeamish, or protecting his suit, or worried about AIDS. The referee was awash in the blood, but did not seem to mind; he had been bled on before.

(Later, at the end of the night, the referee used a stopped-up sink in the men's room to soak his shirt. A pale-skinned, beefy fellow with an iron-gray crew cut and copious body hair, he had stripped down to a dark blue sleeveless T-shirt and was kneading his once-light-blue dress shirt in a pool of pink water. He had taken off his black bow tie and once-white surgical gloves and set them at the edge of the sink. One of the gloves, inside-out, seemed to be pointing a finger at the mess in the sink. It looked as if he had performed a successful roadside appendectomy with his car tools on the way home from an evening at the Rotary Club. Men from the audience made wide detours around him on their way to the urinals, all but one of which had backed up and were no longer flushing. The referee patiently did his laundry amid the comings and goings of men, the cigarette smoke, the cloying stink of deodorant cakes in the urinals, and the strong, astringent smell of beer drinkers' piss.)

It took a couple of rounds for the spectators, who flinched every time flying blood caught the lights, to realize that Art was winning the fight.

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The mostly inaccurate punching frenzy he embarked upon after suffering the cut gradually wore Speight down, accomplishing the goal Art usually pursued with several more rounds' worth of studied sharpshooting. Speight was probably in better shape than Art, but having a groaning, bloodied maniac flailing after him for long three-minute stretches seemed to drain Speight's energy and resolve. By the fifth round, Speight was no longer circling, no longer throwing many punches. He snapped occasional jabs at Art, but none of them landed near the cut and they did not bother Art much. Art, realizing he had messily accomplished an important task—breaking Speight's initial energy and confidence—and was now ahead of schedule to win by decision, reined himself in but kept up the pressure. He began to land hard, accurate punches and Speight found himself backing sulkily toward the ropes, well behind on points, as usual. Having taken command of the fight, Art threw rights with renewed authority, confident that Speight would not take advantage of the openings for counterpunching that he created. The younger man's offense slacked off to almost nothing. By midfight, Art was no longer bleeding from the cut next to his right eye, and was bleeding only a little from another cut in the scar tissue on the bridge of his nose; Speight, though, bled in a slow, dark flow from both nostrils.

Cut time was over. The black-suited bandleader played a last atonal screech, took his horn from his mouth, and stepped back as the drummer changed pace and kicked into a straight-ahead 4/4 standard: The Exum Speight Loses Another Fight Blues.

The fight entered its last movement. Both men tired, and both had gone the distance often enough to be familiar with bone-deep exhaustion, but Art was better at fighting to win in that state. He seemed to welcome fatigue as a condition in his favor, in the way that certain racehorses favor a muddy track. For Speight, being tired was part of a familiar process in which resolve gave way to resignation and, almost inevitably, to the referee raising the other man's taped hand. Experience had formed a rut rather than a reserve in him. One problem with being tough and strong is that the realization of being bested, of feeling the other fighter's hands shaping the bout, comes as a terribly dispiriting shock every time, no matter how often it happens and no matter how familiar it becomes. Speight, having become excited and perhaps even a bit frightened when he saw that Art was badly cut, and having plunged steeply into a depression when Art had not quit because of the cut, now looked as if he had a headache and wanted to go home. But Art—tired as he was and would be, without grandiose prospects but possessed of a thick and instructive past—had found his rhythm. He moved fluidly and with great purpose, cutting off the ring, controlling Speight's movements with jabs and double-jabs, snapping Speight's head back with hard rights. Speight roused himself to hit Art on the chin, a hard shot, after the bell at the

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end of the fifth round; Art, unshaken, grinned at him evilly before going back to his corner. Both of them knew that Speight already regarded the fight as lost and done with: if a professional opponent in good fighting trim has gone deep enough into a bout to be genuinely tired, it means he has already earned his paycheck by putting up a creditable battle.

Storybook logic does not apply to tank-town fights. Once Art had the fight in hand, there was no reason for him to get all crazy in trying to knock Speight out. As Art piled up rounds with the judges, he became more careful. By the end he was doing just enough to win every round, and the two men spent the last couple of rounds leaning on one another, for which Speight had a point deducted by the blood-soaked referee. Art won the decision by a wide margin on every judge's card. It had been a difficult job of work, and he had been obliged to do it the hard way, as usual.

Russell did not talk much on the ride back later that night. We sped along the highway in reflective silence. When I got home, having dropped him off along the curving drive that bisected the darkened campus, my wife was sleeping and the house was still. I was living then in Easton, a Pennsylvania college town so quiet that after midnight one can hear traffic on the highway in the distance. Fight night was in my head, strong against the stillness, as I made my way through the dark house and up the stairs: the red gloves and infinitely redder blood, the moving bodies, the ceaseless oceanic sound made by even a small fight crowd, the clarity of every stain and thread under the ring lights, the smoke, the shock of solid punches, the complicated rhythms of clinches and infighting, the high, wavering almost-note of cut time. Bending in front of the bathroom sink to wash my face, I looked in the mirror and discovered that there were bright spots of blood on my pale green shirt. Three more, crusted and almost black, made a kind of Orion's Belt across my forehead. I had already noticed at ringside that there was blood on my notes and my pants. It was almost certainly all Art's, although I suppose some of it could have come from Speight's nose. I washed my face and then I ran water in the sink to soak the shirt.

In the months that followed, Russell found a teacher, a retired fighter who sometimes worked with novices, and eventually declared himself ready to try the Golden Gloves. He was wrong. Russell described his amateur debut as a sort of out-of-body nightmare. He felt himself submerged in a flatfooted torpor in which he moved with desperately inappropriate serenity while the other fighter, unspeakably quick and confident, pounded him at will. Russell was not badly hurt, but he was thoroughly beaten. After the first round, the referee came to Russell's corner to ask if he wished to continue, and he did, but the referee stopped the bout in the second. Feeling himself profoundly out of place

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in the ring and in his own body, sustained only by courage once his craft had deserted him, seemingly unable to defend himself or fight back, Russell had frozen in the ring, as novices sometimes do. "I never got started," he told me. "It was like I wasn't even there."

I moved away from Easton soon after, but, back to visit a year later, I dropped by the Larry Holmes Training Center one afternoon. The fighters poured sweat in the late September heat. Stripped to a black tank top and shorts, Art was hitting a heavy bag steadily and well—first the left hand twice, a jab and a hook, then a right cross. Somebody was hitting the other heavy bag very hard; it jumped with each blow, and the thump-crack of sharp punching filled the long, low room. When the second hitter moved around his bag and out from behind Art, I could see it was Russell. There was a new weight and speed in his punching, and he had his legs and shoulders into the making of each punch. His diligence and his teacher's efforts had evidently paid off in an improved command of leverage. He was working on power shots: his left hooks made a perfect L from shoulder to glove, staving in the bag on one side; his straight rights imparted the illusion of animate sensitivity to the bag as it leapt away from the impact. He looked bigger than before, having begun to fill out, but, more than that, he looked looser, more competent, more alert. He had lost the quality of undersea abstraction that had always surrounded him in the gym. There was confident vigor in the way he shoved the bag away so it would swing back at him: he looked forward to its arrival because he was going to hit it just right, with all of himself behind the gloved fist.

I raised an eyebrow at Jeff, a stocky gym regular who worked for the grounds crew up at the college in the mornings and for Larry Holmes in the afternoons. He looked over at Russell, smiled and nodded, and said, "Yeah, Russ has been getting it together. He can *hit,* man. He was in sparring with one of those boys last week and the guy's head was just going like this: bop! bop! bop!" With each *bop!* Jeff threw his head back, chin up, like a fighter getting tagged. One of Holmes's seconds, a round-bodied, characteristically surly fellow named Charlie, chimed in: "Russ can hit. No doubt about it. He had his problems for a while, he got beat up, but he stayed with it and he's getting good. He gets in there this time, he'll surprise some people. Hurt 'em." This was unlooked-for, wildly enthusiastic praise coming from Charlie, who usually ignored the younger fighters in the gym except to shoo them out of the ring when Holmes was ready to work out.

Loyal to one of the gym's most diligent regulars, if not one of its most talented, Jeff and Charlie were talking Russell up to one of his professors, but anyone could see that he had made an important step forward on the way from dabbler to fighter. It looked as if he had arrived at a sense of belonging in the gym, not because he was training next to Art, but be-

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cause he was doing it right and knew himself to be doing it right. Maybe the Golden Gloves beating had helped to drive home the lesson that just wanting to be in the ring is not a good enough reason to be there; you have to accept responsibility for your part in the mutual laying on of hands. I expected that Russell would not freeze up in his next fight. He was still slow and hittable, and he might well lose; if he did, however, it would not be because he felt out of place in the ring but because he was outboxed or made mistakes or was simply not quick enough. And if the other guy let Russell start throwing punches, Russell might just give him a beating, or at least a stiff punch or two to remember him by.

When I got back home to Boston I sent Russell an e-mail saying I was pleased to see that he had made such progress in the gym. I admitted I had worried in the past that he would get seriously hurt, perhaps even in a life-changing way, because he was in the gym for the wrong reasons—to absorb "life experience" passively rather than to train actively at a craft—but I was less worried now that he had evidently got down to work in earnest. I was initially surprised, then, when Russell wrote back a couple of weeks later to announce a retirement of sorts:

> In earnest, I have become somewhat disenchanted with boxing. There seems to be a level, which I have reached, at which it has lost to some extent its seductive and mesmorizing effect. While I will always retain an interest and awe in the sport, I feel that I can understand the subtleties of the sport and could even execute them given the proper conditioning and practice. While I regard Larry and other successfull boxers with the utmost respect and admiration, there seems to be a lack of transcendence into a higher state of more complete perfection in the human realm. Financial gain does not take the fighter out of the street and its culture, nor does it provide him with any solice or real advancement. I may be sounding somewhat highbrow, however, I now realize that I have bigger fish to fry. With my college education quickly coming to a close I need to focus the resource of my time on things which will propell my advancement after graduation. I will certainly remain active in training and boxing but I realistically can no longer give it my full commitment (and just when I was starting to see the fruit of my labor) . . .
>
> Still in need of an appropriate nickname,
> Russell

Seduction, proper conditioning and practice, a lack of transcendence, bigger fish to fry, a reapportioning of resources: a college man's romance with boxing in brief.

Russell's retirement should not have surprised me. He finished with boxing when he had learned enough—about hitting and about being hit, about other people and himself, about what Douglass and Bartleby had

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to say about "life experience"—to understand how fighters submit to being molded by one another. The long line of men who had hit Art in the right eye had contributed to making him a man who could handle cut time. If the line continued to get longer, though, Art would inevitably deform his style to protect the weak spot, leaving new openings for opponents to exploit. Too much of that would cause Art to end up like Exum Speight. The already too-long line of men who had outpunched Speight had taught him to expect defeat and even collaborate in it. Red-blooded convention treats boxing as a matter of one fighter asserting himself forcefully over another, but boxing is just as much a matter of accepting that what you become rests in the hands of others. Or in the hands of orchestrated circumstance: summoned to Allentown to lose a fight, Speight did not set out to initiate cut time in the second round of his bout with Art; he just counterpunched into a hole in the hometown favorite's defense. Had Russell gone further than he did in boxing—and especially had he turned pro, shedding the amateur's protective headgear—he would have had to accept cut time as a reasonable possibility, a condition likely to be thrust upon a hard hitter who takes too many punches in return. Both Art and Speight, both the man who was cut and the man who cut him, knew themselves to *deserve* cut time. Russell quit before reaching that stage of resignation, but he went far enough that his Golden Gloves opponent, his trainer, and his sparring partners helped him get the feel and the sense of it in his body, where they will persist.

Russell carried six courses in his last semester of college, which left little time for boxing. He said, "I'll spar again, maybe, but I don't think I will fight in the Golden Gloves. I'm too busy, and I'm not as hungry as I was. It's not worth the risk." Art, of course, kept fighting. I have seen him in action twice since then. In the first bout, he suffered a dubious first-round knockout at the hands of an overrated prospect named Baby Joe Mesi. The first time Mesi threw a hard punch, Art went over backwards and lay still, like a Hollywood stuntman leveled by an action hero. It was a record-padder for Mesi, a quick if humiliating payday for Art. In the second bout, a difficult victory of the kind in which Art specializes, he outlasted a bruiser from Philadelphia named Byron Jones. The victory evened Art's lifetime record at thirteen wins and thirteen losses. After sixteen years of hard going in and out of the ring, he had fought the business to a bloody draw.

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Traveling

NIKIA LEOPOLD

There's a new roundabout
on the way to the nursing home,
brick circle with a square
of earth left in the center.
I'd plant a dogwood there—
long pleasure in those petals—
dun to cream to flat white chalk . . .
White as my father's hair,
wheelchair locked at the lunch table.
He's forgotten my name, but knows me.
His voice is deep and raspy with a cold,
oddly virile coming from the fragile body.
He chuckles and I ask him why;
even a smile these days is unusual.
He begins to sing; unheard of:
"Tell me, when the sun goes down,
will there be any stars in my crown?"
He laughs with a slyness new to him
and hairs rise on my forearms.
He's silent then, intent on the travel
of food to fork to mouth.
I'm silent, too, remembering those trips
to Tennesee to visit Grandmother,
how eagerly he named the towns
we drove through: Sharon, Troy, McKenzie
until in Howell we found her
and he'd lift her laughing off the ground . . .
I stoop, we hug good-bye,
his arms still sinewy.
On the drive back, the little circle
thrives with traffic. I wait my chance
to dart into the stream,
imagining an ancient tree,
brittle branches alive with stars.

~ Nikia Leopold writes and illustrates children's books, the most recent of which is *Once I Was . . . .*

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Life Painting

SAMUEL HAZO

Three days of laundry wait
for her at home.
Her neck
is stiff from posing.
Twice
minimum wage is what she's earning,
and the class is mixed.
Her nipples
harden in the cold.
She itches
where she'd never scratch herself
in public.
She tries to think
about the wash and how abundantly
the sheets will billow in the dryer . . .
Females behind their easels
see her merely as another
of their kind, observing where
she's fat and where she's not.
They sketch her face with more
attention than they give the rest
of her.
The men see more—
a woman nakedly employed—

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twin dimples in her lower
back—the vortex in the loins
where all desires end,
and life's set free.
Desire's
in the air.
The men pay less
attention to the woman's face
than to her thighs.
Someone
announces that the sitting's over.
The painters pack their tubes
and brushes.
Seen from above
the class might seem a tight
isosceles of billiard balls
transformed from nouns to verbs
precisely when the cue ball
strikes.
They scatter to their lives.
The model reaches for her robe.
She scans each drying canvas
as she leaves.
Not one resembles her.

Samuel Hazo, McAnulty Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Duquesne University and Director of the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh, is the author of *The Holy Surprise of Right Now* and *As They Sail* (poetry), *Stills* (a novel), and *Spying for God* (essays). He was named the first State Poet of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1993, a position he still holds.

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Asleep with the Dog

ANDREW HUDGINS

Curled into my side,
—tight, part of me—she whimpers,
twitches, growls,
and in her unbroken dream,
and my broken one,
we bull through saw grass, blast
through burning bramble,
murderously fixed
on rabbit—not
the tossed ball and contemptible
stick of this afternoon
and the one before and the one after.
She shakes the dream-prey,
She prances with joy, joy
in the death-work,
trembles with it, blood-joy,
can't contain it, can*not*
contain it, awe, and I dream
I tremble her trembling,
my brain bright with her fire,
her desire mine
in my half-dream of imperfect
and knowable otherness—
and if I do not tremble
I can dream it
for a moment longer, I can linger
for a moment longer,
in this lie I have loved with my life.

Andrew Hudgins, Professor of English at the University of Cincinnati, is the author of five books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Babylon in a Jar*. His essay "Half-Answered Prayers" appeared in the Spring 1999 issue of the SCHOLAR.

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The Authority of Failure

MORRIS DICKSTEIN

The centennial of F. Scott Fitzgerald—a writer whose work still feels so fresh, who died young and seems perpetually young, like Keats, the poet he most loved—passed with some fanfare in September 1996. Fitzgerald scholars and enthusiasts met at Princeton to celebrate his life and work, and on his actual birthday I found myself speaking about him at the Great Neck Public Library on Long Island, in the very town where he conceived *The Great Gatsby* and began writing it in 1922 and 1923. Great Neck was then a fashionable new suburb, much beloved by show-business types like Eddie Cantor. But it was also the place where Fitzgerald and his wife threw themselves into the wild, sad, drunken parties he portrayed with such satiric gusto, yet also with a tragic edge, in *Gatsby*—parties that mean as little to Gatsby himself as to the guests who sponge off him.

His Great Neck years were not the happiest of Fitzgerald's life, though he seemed, like Gatsby, to be sitting on top of the world. He had only one writer friend there, Ring Lardner, who drank even more than he did. Fitzgerald tended to go off on benders for two or three days in New York. It was there he wrote his only play, a political fantasy called *The Vegetable*, which he hoped would make his fortune. It died in Atlantic City in November 1923, on its way to a Broadway staging that never took place. Fitzgerald could not forget this taste of failure. "I worked hard as hell last winter," he later wrote, "but it was all trash and it nearly broke my heart as well as my iron constitution." He was only twenty-seven years old.

Morris Dickstein is Distinguished Professor of English at Queens College and Director of the Center for the Humanities at the CUNY Graduate School. His books include *Keats and His Poetry*, *Gates of Eden*, and *Double Agent: The Critic and Society*. This article will appear in a collection of centennial essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald edited by Jackson R. Bryer, Ruth Prigozy, and Milton Stern.

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Many people would have been surprised at the sad note of waste and decline that seeps into this comment—partly because his best work was still before him, but also because Fitzgerald and his young wife, Zelda, were at that moment the very embodiments of youthful energy and style for fashionable America. But our continuing sense of Fitzgerald as a poet of lyrical longing and dreamy aspiration can easily obscure the darker, more somber side of his work. Like his friend Hemingway, Fitzgerald was not simply a writer but a figure, a cultural icon who would always remain linked in the popular mind with the fizz and exuberance of what he himself dubbed the Jazz Age.

A key element of the Fitzgerald myth, especially that sense of his perpetual high spirits, came from his connection with Princeton. Much to his embarrassment he never graduated, but in a sense he graduated posthumously when the university became the much-visited haven for his voluminous papers. When Fitzgerald arrived in 1913, Princeton was in many ways far from a very serious university—though it had become more serious under its most recent president, Woodrow Wilson, who had gone on to become governor of New Jersey and, earlier that year, president of the United States. It was a very white, very male university, hardly expensive by today's standards, but accessible mainly to the children of the rich, those from "good" families who had gone to elite boarding schools. Though Fitzgerald's friend and classmate, Edmund Wilson—later America's leading literary critic—managed to get a splendid education there, for many others the gentleman's C was a way of life, and there was a long tradition behind it. You could get by quite well without cracking a book. Most Ivy League colleges were so frivolous that the more thoughtful undergraduates, Fitzgerald included, later believed they had acquired their education only after they left school.

As a midwestern boy, Fitzgerald felt like an outsider, not one to the manor born. But as an outsider he came to love everything about the school: the dating rituals, the drunken sprees, the football games he never managed to compete in, the varsity shows he helped write with his friend Wilson, and which became the high points of his college career. A few years later, in the spring of 1920, he published *This Side of Paradise,* a thinly disguised version of his college experiences; to everyone's surprise, it became an overnight sensation. Like Lord Byron in 1812, Fitzgerald awoke and found himself famous. His commercial and literary careers were launched. A few days later, in a grand ceremony in St. Patrick's Cathedral, he married the belle of Montgomery, Alabama, Zelda Sayre, a daffy and beautiful young woman who had once broken off her engagement to him because his financial prospects were so dim.

With the wild success of the book and the brilliance of their marriage, Scott and Zelda embarked on a decade-long odyssey as the brilliant

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young couple whose beauty, charm, and sense of fun embodied the devil-may-care spirit of the postwar generation. Whether they were living among theater people in Great Neck, swimming with other expatriate Americans on the Riviera, or writing amusing little stories and articles about each other for stylish popular magazines, Scott and Zelda came to personify the new youth culture of the Jazz Age, when life seemed like a drunken lark, and a good part of privileged young America went on a hedonistic spree.

Living in the public eye, always furnishing good copy, Scott and Zelda helped write the script that cast them as legends. This was the beginning of the media age, with its emphasis on personality, novelty, showmanship, and style. The best one can say about Fitzgerald's role as a celebrity was that, unlike Hemingway, he never believed his own clippings and always kept a good deal of himself in reserve.

Part of Fitzgerald's problem came later, during the Depression, when his name remained associated with his portraits of the rich; this in turn was mistaken for admiration, approval, and envy of their fashionable lives. But Fitzgerald, though fascinated by the manners and morals of the rich and intrigued by the freedom that came with their money, nourished a burning ambition to be a serious writer, someone whose work would matter to people fifty years later. Among the rich, he never forgot that he was an outsider, but Fitzgerald also proved to be a wickedly percipient yet empathetic observer. He took note of how much and yet how little their money could do for them—how much freedom and style it gave them, but how little protection it furnished against disappointment and unhappiness, as he would later discover for himself.

Fame is famously fickle. Soon after the crash, everything from the 1920s seemed like ancient history, a tale of sound, fury, and innocence before the fall; and Fitzgerald's shallow celebrity was no exception. Within a few years, Scott Fitzgerald would be an icon of a different kind: once a byword for youth, elegance, and exuberance, he would become an emblem of failure, a back number. Once again, with a vengeance, the myth would obscure the writer and come close to obliterating him. This remains the lesser-known Fitzgerald, the gifted but chastened Fitzgerald of the 1930s. The legend of his decline, which he helped broadcast, continues to haunt his reputation today.

Perhaps the worst moment of this unhappy story came in the fall of 1936. Fitzgerald was about to turn forty, no easy transition for someone whose life was once identified with the passion and promise of youth. Things had long since begun to sour for him. In 1930, Zelda, increasingly desperate to find herself as a writer, a dancer, or simply someone who had a life in her own right, had suffered a nervous breakdown. Since then she

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had been in and out of hospitals. Scott himself had had a critical success in 1925 with *The Great Gatsby*, a book admired by writers as different as Edith Wharton and T. S. Eliot. But commercially, compared with his apprentice novels and short fiction, it was a disappointment. His effort to storm Broadway had failed. Once he had had an almost golden facility, but he struggled for nine years to finish his next novel, *Tender Is the Night*, which got a mixed reaction from critics and the public when it finally appeared in 1934. Reviewers were puzzled and ambivalent; sales were even more disappointing. Fitzgerald had become a chronic alcoholic, and the failure of his most ambitious book sent him over the edge. But he did more than abuse his health and break down: in the spring of 1936, in a shocking series of articles for *Esquire*, he wrote about his problems in a harsh, unsparing, confessional vein—something familiar to us today from memoirs and talk shows, in which dysfunction has gone public, but completely unheard-of in those more reticent and buttoned-up times.

In these articles Fitzgerald hardly came clean about either his marital problems or his drinking, but he described in surprising detail his loss of confidence and vitality, his failure to take care of his talent, his waste of energy on simply being a celebrity—on his need to be liked, to be charming and personable, to be all things to everyone he knew. This was not yet a therapeutic culture, though Dale Carnegie was just then making his auspicious debut. Hemingway, Fitzgerald's friend and cruel rival, who would spend a lifetime burnishing his own myth, was aghast that he would expose himself in this way. Their mutual editor, the legendary Maxwell Perkins of Scribner's, a man of infinite discretion, was saddened and disapproving. Another friend, John Dos Passos, couldn't imagine how anyone could waste his energy on merely personal problems when the whole world was coming apart. But these poignantly written *Esquire* articles brought Fitzgerald's name before the public again, as it had not been for a long time.

Into this picture came a reporter for the *New York Post*, perhaps not so different then from the Murdoch-driven paper it is today, a reporter with the ominous name of Michael Mok, to interview Scott for his fortieth birthday. There was a scent of blood in the water. Fitzgerald was under a nurse's care at an inn in Asheville, North Carolina, but he was still drinking, and the reporter described in wretched detail how he kept popping up for a thimbleful of gin from the makeshift bar, how his face twitched and his hands shook as he described his life and made the usual drunkard's rationalizations.

The front page of the *Post* the next day told the whole story:

> The Other Side of Paradise / F. Scott Fitzgerald, 40, / Engulfed in Despair / Broken in Health He Spends Birthday Re- / gretting That He Has Lost Faith in His Star.

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What had been eloquent if not wholly frank in Fitzgerald's own articles became pathetic in the tabloid version. *Time* picked up the story and gave it much wider currency. The effect on Fitzgerald was catastrophic. He thought he was ruined and took an overdose of morphine but luckily vomited it up. He felt his credibility as a writer and a serious man was gone. The *Post* interview marked perhaps the lowest point he reached in the decade, but it fixed his image as a washed-up, self-pitying writer, a miserable caretaker of his talent, the relic of a distant and unlamented era. (Even ten years later, when reviewers like Lionel Trilling wrote about *The Crack-Up*, Edmund Wilson's collection of his late friend's articles and letters, they would still point to the effects of the *Post* story on Fitzgerald's waning reputation.)

In a limited sense this image endures today. No one, of course, thinks of Fitzgerald as a pathetic drunk—a "rummy," as Hemingway called him. In fact, Fitzgerald's reputation bounced back amazingly after the war, and *The Great Gatsby* is secure as one of the most widely taught of twentieth-century American classics. But most people still think of his life in the 1930s as the melancholy aftermath of his brilliant decade, a time of decline and failure as vividly portrayed by the man himself. There is no doubt how much he really did suffer during this period, when his golden marriage was all but over, when drink and disappointment often made him behave strangely, when his stories were no longer welcome in magazines that had provided most of his income, when even Hollywood could find no real use for his talents. In the popular mind today, he remains the chronicler of the Jazz Age, the flapper era, the frivolous youth culture, and the more flagrant excesses of the American Dream.

To the socially minded critics of the Depression years Fitzgerald was simply irrelevant. This view has curiously been resurrected among some scholars today, who have repeatedly drawn attention to neglected black, proletarian, or women writers of the period. It would be an exaggeration to say that an interest in Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, or the Harlem Renaissance has been purchased at the expense of, say, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, or *As I Lay Dying*. Making space for the rediscovered books of Hurston or Nella Larsen doesn't undercut Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner: the literary canon isn't a zero-sum game, even if the syllabus may be limited. But to many professors, Fitzgerald has simply become one of the dead white males, more a burden than a revelation.

Overall, Fitzgerald's work has weathered the politics of multiculturalism reasonably well. Students today still respond passionately to his books, especially *The Great Gatsby*, even if their teachers have become bored with connecting it to the American Dream, and perhaps have passed on some of this boredom to their charges. There are scholars who feel that Fitzgerald deals with much too narrow a class of privileged

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Americans. This echoes the widespread disapproval of his work that was heard during the Marxist thirties, when proletarian critics grew tired of reading about the Lost Generation and the emotional entanglements of wealthy expatriates on the Riviera in the 1920s. As the young critic Philip Rahv wrote in the Communist *Daily Worker*, reviewing *Tender Is the Night* when it appeared in 1934, "Dear Mr. Fitzgerald, you can't hide from a hurricane under a beach umbrella." The hurricane, of course, was the Depression, which exposed the failure of capitalism and drew attention to the class antagonisms that Americans had usually tried to soften and blur.

To his credit, Rahv understood that Fitzgerald's most complex novel, with its assortment of wealthy and idle characters, was a fierce yet subtle indictment of the rich, not a sycophantic tribute to them. But the interests of readers and critics alike had turned elsewhere, the language of fiction had grown simpler and more plebeian, and Rahv felt that Fitzgerald's celebrated style obscured his harsh theme, "transforming it into a mere opportunity for endless psychologizing." Psychology was generally a bad thing for thirties Marxists, for it drew attention to personal problems—a bourgeois luxury—rather than the social structures of exploitation and injustice. The *New Masses* reviewer of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, published the same year, had mocked the young protagonist as a "six-year-old Proust" and lamented that "so many young writers drawn from the proletariat can make no better use of their working class experience than as material for introspective and febrile novels." The same buzzword, *introspective*, appears in Rahv's review of Fitzgerald when he complains of the novel's "delicate, introspective wording . . . its tortuous style that varnishes rather than reveals the essential facts."

It's certainly no news that Marxist critics of the 1930s were none too fond of introspection or stylistic elaboration. They thought they already knew all "the essential facts" about our society, and they preferred a more hard-boiled manner to reveal the unvarnished truth as they saw it. Ironically, Fitzgerald's own style did become more spare and direct as his life went downhill after 1929 and 1930. The content of his work changed as well, for he was struck by the eerie parallels between his own change of fortunes and the fate of Americans at large—who had prospered in the twenties when he was at the peak of his fame, broken down just as Zelda had her first nervous breakdown in 1930, and continued to suffer as Fitzgerald himself came apart after the relative failure of *Tender Is the Night*. "My recent experience parallels the wave of despair that swept the nation when the Boom was over," he wrote in his last *Esquire* piece. He felt he had experienced the crash in personal terms.

In short, it was an already deeply wounded man who was mocked in the *Post* in 1936—but, oddly, someone who had become more of a Depression writer than his critics realized, a writer whose own reverses made him more sympathetic to the failure and misery of others. There is irony

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here: like another great figure from the 1920s, the seemingly mandarin poet Wallace Stevens, Fitzgerald was attacked by the camp that, in his own fashion, he was actually trying to join. Still, as he began to see himself not as the favored child of fortune, the young prince in the fairy tale, but as a representative man, his work became more, not less, introspective. In the thirties, taking stock of his own problems, trying to salvage something out of his losses, Fitzgerald virtually invented the confessional mode in American writing. Later works like Norman Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself* or Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (both published in 1959) would have been impossible or quite different without the much-maligned example of the *Crack-Up* essays. This suggests that it may not be the lyrical, romantic Fitzgerald of the twenties who most claims our attention today, but the shattered, disillusioned Fitzgerald of the thirties—not the poet of early success, romantic possibility, and nostalgic regret, but the hard-edged analyst of personal failure and irretrievable loss, the man who redeemed in his work what was slipping away from his life, who achieved a hard-won maturity even as he described himself as a failure, an exhausted man, a spent force.

This is the final irony—that the dark image of Fitzgerald in the 1930s came from Fitzgerald himself, not from the malicious pen of Mr. Mok and the *Post* headline writers. Starting with stories he wrote in 1929 and 1930, long before the *Crack-Up* articles, Fitzgerald gave an unsparing account of what was going wrong in his life. More than that, he made creative use of it to take his work in a daring new direction. As in the twenties, he was the source of the myths that circulated around him, but unlike Hemingway he saved them for his own writing, not simply for the gossip columns. This points to the great difference between a writer who breaks down and can't work and one who uses his frustrations and disappointments as new material, producing work that shows a quantum leap in human understanding.

In one sense, Fitzgerald's writing after 1929 or 1930 became the opposite of everything that had preceded it. He became the poet of failure and decline rather than of youthful, romantic inspiration. With each revision of the book that became *Tender Is the Night*, the expatriate life of his initial models, Gerald and Sara Murphy, gave way to the troubled history of Scott and Zelda, including her breakdown and his sense of creative blockage and diminished promise. Yet in other ways this was a clear development from his earlier writings. In "Early Success," an essay written in 1937, when such success was long behind him, he recalled how everything seemed to go awry for his young heroes. "All the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them—the lovely young creatures in my novels went to ruins, the diamond mountains of my short stories blew up, my millionaires were as beautiful and damned as Thomas

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Hardy's peasants." Fitzgerald came to realize that there was always a kernel of tragedy, a dose of melancholy in them, a backdrop of dark clouds that he had not yet encountered in his own life. But it was all bathed in a romantic glow, a poignant sense of thwarted possibility, loss, and regret.

One of my favorite examples is a 1922 story called "Winter Dreams." Fitzgerald himself said it was an early sketch for *The Great Gatsby.* The very title embodies the story's contradictory moods of hope and frustration, dream and denial. The young hero, with the slightly mocking name of Dexter Green, has invested his winter dreams in a young woman with an even more banal name, Judy Jones—a forerunner of Gatsby's great flame, Daisy Buchanan. By the end, after she has toyed with him for years, Dexter finds that Judy has married a man who mistreats her and, worse still, that she has lost her looks, has become commonplace—a shattered dream rather than one that was simply unfulfilled: "The dream was gone. Something had been taken from him." He thinks of

> her mouth damp to his kisses and her eyes plaintive with melancholy and her freshness like new fine linen in the morning. Why, these things were no longer in the world! They had existed and they existed no longer.
>
> For the first time in years the tears were streaming down his face. But they were for himself now. He did not care about mouth and eyes and moving hands. He wanted to care, and he could not care. For he had gone away and he could never go back any more.

No one can fail to be moved by the tender simplicity of these lines, which combine a plangent feeling of loss with a hard-nosed sense of inevitability: these things once seemed possible, now they are not to be. In his early work Fitzgerald was a dreamer, but not someone who believed that dreams could be realized. Already in the 1920s, his work had a tragic and elegiac cast, yet he still valued his heroes, like Gatsby, for their generous illusions, for the glow of possibility that surrounded them. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel about a self-made man, about the grandeur and failure of our dreams, but also about all that distinguishes them from reality. Think of Nick Carraway's harsh judgment of Daisy Buchanan and the illusions Gatsby has fabricated around her. But think also of Nick's surprisingly warm farewell to Gatsby, to whom he alone remains faithful. With his impetuous faith in people, Gatsby is the kind of creature Emily Dickinson had in mind when she wrote, "I dwell in Possibility— / A fairer House than Prose."

This poetic glow of possibility was precisely what diminished into prose for Fitzgerald, starting with some harsh stories about the disintegration of a marriage—"The Rough Crossing" of 1929, and "One Trip Abroad" from 1930. These were stories that he never reprinted because they were too close to material he was developing for *Tender Is the Night.*

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Both stories, like *Tender*, are about Americans abroad; both use travel and even bad weather as metaphors for what distracts people from each other, wears them out, and shows up the fault lines in marriages; and both make disillusion and disappointment their central theme. While "The Rough Crossing" centers on a single bad trip, "One Trip Abroad" follows a couple through years of aimless wandering as they move from one hollow niche of "society" to another. Now broken in health, they have finally landed in a sanitarium in Switzerland, "a country where very few things begin, but many things end." There they see another couple and, in a melodramatic flash of lightning, realize that the pair are their younger selves as we saw them at the beginning of the story, not yet tired, ill, decadent, and out of tune with each other. Despite its unusual Gothic touches, "One Trip" is a schematic miniature of *Tender Is the Night* (its heroine is even called Nicole) in much the same way that "Winter Dreams" contains the seed of *The Great Gatsby*.

But "One Trip Abroad" also connects directly with Fitzgerald's next important piece of fiction, one of his most resonant and enduring stories, "Babylon Revisited." First published in 1931, and probably the only work of Fitzgerald's that is as widely taught as *The Great Gatsby*, "Babylon" also has its nonfiction parallel in an oft-quoted essay written around the same time, "Echoes of the Jazz Age." Always a staple for historians writing about the 1920s, the essay debunks the very period with which Fitzgerald's name is associated; by 1931, less than two years after the stock-market crash, the twenties already felt like ancient history ("only yesterday," as Frederick Lewis Allen put it in the title of his famous social history, also published in 1931). Fitzgerald sees the period somewhat nostalgically, but with mock horror, as his own and the culture's "wasted youth," a "flimsy structure," built on "borrowed time," that came tumbling down when the players lost all their confidence. But whatever elegiac glow could be found in the essay was ruthlessly excised from the story, where there is almost nothing of value to redeem the old way of life.

Charlie Wales returns to Paris, the scene of many a debauch in the 1920s, to reclaim his daughter from the fierce sister-in-law to whom he had been forced to surrender custody. His wife had died under circumstances for which he bears some responsibility; his own health had broken under the weight of his drinking; but now, like Fitzgerald himself in *The Crack-Up*, he has somehow managed to paste it all together. Sober and serious for the first time in years, he wants his daughter back before her childhood has completely passed, before she no longer really knows him. Much of the story is taken up with his reflections on his former life.

"He suddenly realized the meaning of the word 'dissipate' [a word that had also figured significantly in "One Trip Abroad"]—to dissipate into thin air; to make nothing out of something." "He remembered thousand-franc notes given to an orchestra for playing a single number,

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hundred-franc notes tossed to a doorman for calling a cab." This once had seemed insouciant, carefree, impulsive. "In retrospect it was a nightmare."

His high-strung sister-in-law blames him unfairly for her sister's death, but much as she dislikes him, she is beginning to relent. She can see that he's a changed man, a man who desperately wants his daughter, his future, restored to him. But into this volatile mix comes a blundering, drunken couple from his earlier life—"sudden ghosts out of the past," revenants like the couple in "One Trip Abroad." They are the worn remnants of a time when they all lived for pleasure, for the moment. After one particularly jarring intrusion, Charlie's sister-in-law pulls back, refuses even to see him. By reminding everyone of how he used to live, the doppelgänger couple has done him in, ruined him all over again. Fitzgerald had once focused lovingly on characters who dreamed a life for themselves, imagined an idyllic or romantic future. Now he writes about people who have learned that the past can't easily be set aside: our actions have consequences, and the ghosts of our earlier selves will continue to haunt us, without a trace of their old romantic blush.

Elements of Fitzgerald's new, hard-edged, almost tragic outlook can be found in virtually every significant piece of writing he did in the 1930s—in stories like "Babylon Revisited" and "Crazy Sunday"; in the many essays collected in Edmund Wilson's landmark edition of *The Crack-Up* (the book that helped restore Fitzgerald's reputation after the war); in novels like *Tender Is the Night* and the unfinished *Last Tycoon*; and even in commercial formula fiction like the seventeen Pat Hobby stories Fitzgerald wrote for *Esquire* in the last year of his life—stories that continued appearing, month after month, well past Fitzgerald's death in December 1940.

These brutally satiric stories, written mainly for money, give us Hollywood through the eyes of a hack writer—not Fitzgerald himself, but the kind of facile mediocrity who drove him crazy while he was trying to learn screenwriting as a serious craft. As his name suggests, Pat Hobby is the sort of talentless fellow who knows all the little tricks (tricks so old they don't work anymore), who steals ideas and then schemes for screen credit, but wouldn't dream of reading the books he's supposed to adapt. According to the neat formula Fitzgerald evolved, Pat Hobby gets his well-deserved comeuppance in every story.

Fitzgerald could never write about people entirely from the outside without insinuating something of himself into them, without seeking some authentic core of emotion in their character. The mildly despicable Pat Hobby is washed up, an ineffectual relic of the silent-film days, hanging on by a thread. So Fitzgerald invests some of his own sense of failure in the man's frustrations and reverses, just as he had invested it, much

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more subtly, in the inexorable decline of his real alter ego, Dick Diver, in the second half of *Tender Is the Night.* Pat Hobby has always been a hack, even when the little tricks still came off, but Dick Diver was once a serious, promising, brilliant man, a psychiatrist who made an unfortunate marriage to one of his former patients and, though he was acutely aware of the risk of being bought, gradually allowed himself to be taken over by her wealthy family as a private nursemaid. But this is only one of many reasons that his life goes awry. Dick Diver's decline has no single, definite cause; it has too many causes. Fitzgerald may have modeled it on the vague disintegration of the ambitious and idealistic young minister in one of his favorite novels, Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896). It rivals the precipitous descent of Hurstwood in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* as the greatest failure story in American literature. Like the gifted but flawed protagonist of George Santayana's 1935 novel, *The Last Puritan,* Dick Diver is a man who simply "peters out."

This focus on failure is what makes the last phase of Fitzgerald's career resonate so strongly with the Depression in ways that contemporary readers failed to register. The critics who attacked Fitzgerald for still writing about the rich were as misguided as the friends who accused him of wallowing in self-pity. He had always worked not simply by investing himself in his characters but also by mythologizing himself, heightening his dreams and disappointments into representative moments, carrying much of the culture on his back. Now, as the culture tried to forget him, relegate him to the past, he turned the miseries of his life into confessional fables, becoming again a symbol of the age, this time an unwelcome one, a reminder of how much America had lost. Comparing himself, as usual, with Hemingway, he wrote in his notebooks: "I talk with the authority of failure—Ernest with the authority of success." The operative word here is authority, not just failure: *Something broke in me, but I speak with the force of experience. I am a different animal, someone who has gained a hard-won awareness.* In Whitman's famous words from "Song of Myself," "I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there." He lived it, but rather than buckling under its weight, he also wrote it, transforming it into a story he'd never told before.

Eventually, *Tender Is the Night* grew on readers who had once disliked or misunderstood it. Hemingway, though he later came grudgingly to admire the book, at first objected fiercely to the touches of tragedy in it. His own view was more stoical, fatalistic. "We are all bitched from the start," he wrote to Fitzgerald. "You see Bo, you're not a tragic character. Neither am I." A few years later, Fitzgerald set out to write a tragic novel about Hollywood at exactly the moment he was satirizing it in his stories. The source was not self-pity, as Hemingway mistakenly imagined, but something richer, harsher, deeper—a sense of deprivation and loss that alters one's outlook, a new maturity that comes through in every line of *The Crack-Up, Tender Is the Night,* and the unfinished text of *The Last Tycoon.*

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My emblem for this last phase of Fitzgerald's work is a little-noted passage in his 1932 essay "My Lost City," one of the greatest tributes ever written to New York. Near the end, Fitzgerald does what many New Yorkers did that year, just as the Depression was approaching its darkest point: he goes to the top of the Empire State Building, then newly built, and finds that instead of scaling the heavens, as he might have hoped to do, he gets a better perspective on the terrestrial world below:

> Full of vaunting pride the New Yorker had climbed here and seen with dismay what he had never suspected, that the city was not the endless succession of canyons that he had supposed but that it had *limits* [his italics]—from the tallest structure he saw for the first time that it faded out into the country on all sides, into an expanse of green and blue that alone was limitless. And with the awful realization that New York was a city after all and not a universe, the whole shining edifice that he had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground.

On one level this passage is a little joke on the provinciality of New Yorkers, much like Saul Steinberg's celebrated cartoon of the contracted world west of the Hudson, as seen from Manhattan. But something more serious is also happening here. The "country on all sides," the "expanse of green and blue that alone was limitless," is clearly an allusion to the great climax of *The Great Gatsby,* when, before the narrator's very eyes, "the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh green breast of the new world." There, in Fitzgerald's grandiose leap of imagination, man had come "face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." Here, in "My Lost City," that dreamy, utopian capacity for wonder, the whole imagined sense of possibility, crumbles before a new sense of limits.

The *Gatsby* passage, though hedged with subtle qualifications, speaks for the poetic, expansive Fitzgerald of the 1920s; this new version, with its tone of mockery and humility, speaks for the chastened Fitzgerald of the 1930s, a writer who accords far better with our own painfully acquired sense of limits. What was the watchword of social policy and political frustration in post-sixties America if not a sense of dashed hopes and more limited goals? This is the clear-eyed, unself-pitying mood that underlies every Fitzgerald text of the Depression decade, most patently in *The Crack-Up,* which his contemporaries misread and undervalued, though it should have been as congenial to hard times as it is to our own post-utopian era.

This was the mood of the great Romantic crisis poems, which formed Fitzgerald's sensibility long before he fully understood them, before he actually experienced their peculiar mixture of elation and regret, loss

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and renewal, crisis and resolution. This was the disintoxicated mood of the last stanza of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," a poem Fitzgerald could never read aloud without tears. On the surface it appears that Fitzgerald goes from being a pie-eyed romantic in the twenties to a disillusioned realist in the thirties, except that this very disintoxication is an essential moment of the Romantic imagination. It's the moment of clarity when the dreamer, the visionary, is humanized by loss, by suffering, by fellow feeling—when the mental traveler, no longer adrift in "faery lands forlorn," turns homeward, in Keats's words, to the "sole self," the self without romantic illusions.

All these Romantic poems proceed from a sense of visionary possibility, through a maelstrom of inner crisis and loss, and finally to a modest rededication to new beginnings, exactly as Fitzgerald does in the *Crack-Up* essays. This was the itinerary of "Tintern Abbey" and the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," but perhaps Wordsworth put it best in his "Elegiac Stanzas" about Peele Castle written in 1805, after his beloved brother John was lost at sea. He gazes at a turbulent seascape painted by a friend and thinks how he would once have added some calming touch, a romantic glow—in Wordsworth's famous phrase, "the gleam, / The light that never was, on sea or land." (This is much like the way Fitzgerald himself had provided a shimmer of iridescence at every turn in his early stories, even the sad ones.) But now Wordsworth tells us he can do this no longer. His whole sense of reality has been altered by his brother's unexpected death. Nature now seems anything but benign:

> So once it would have been,—'tis so no more;
> I have submitted to a new control;
> A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
> A deep distress hath humanised my soul.

These troubled but grimly hopeful lines, stark yet somehow consoling, could serve as a motto for the neglected writing of F. Scott Fitzgerald's last decade, when the lyrical dreamer gave way to the damaged but undaunted survivor, chastened by misfortune and a new sense of maturity. With its sober and sobering vision, this may be the work of Fitzgerald's that makes the deepest claim on us today.

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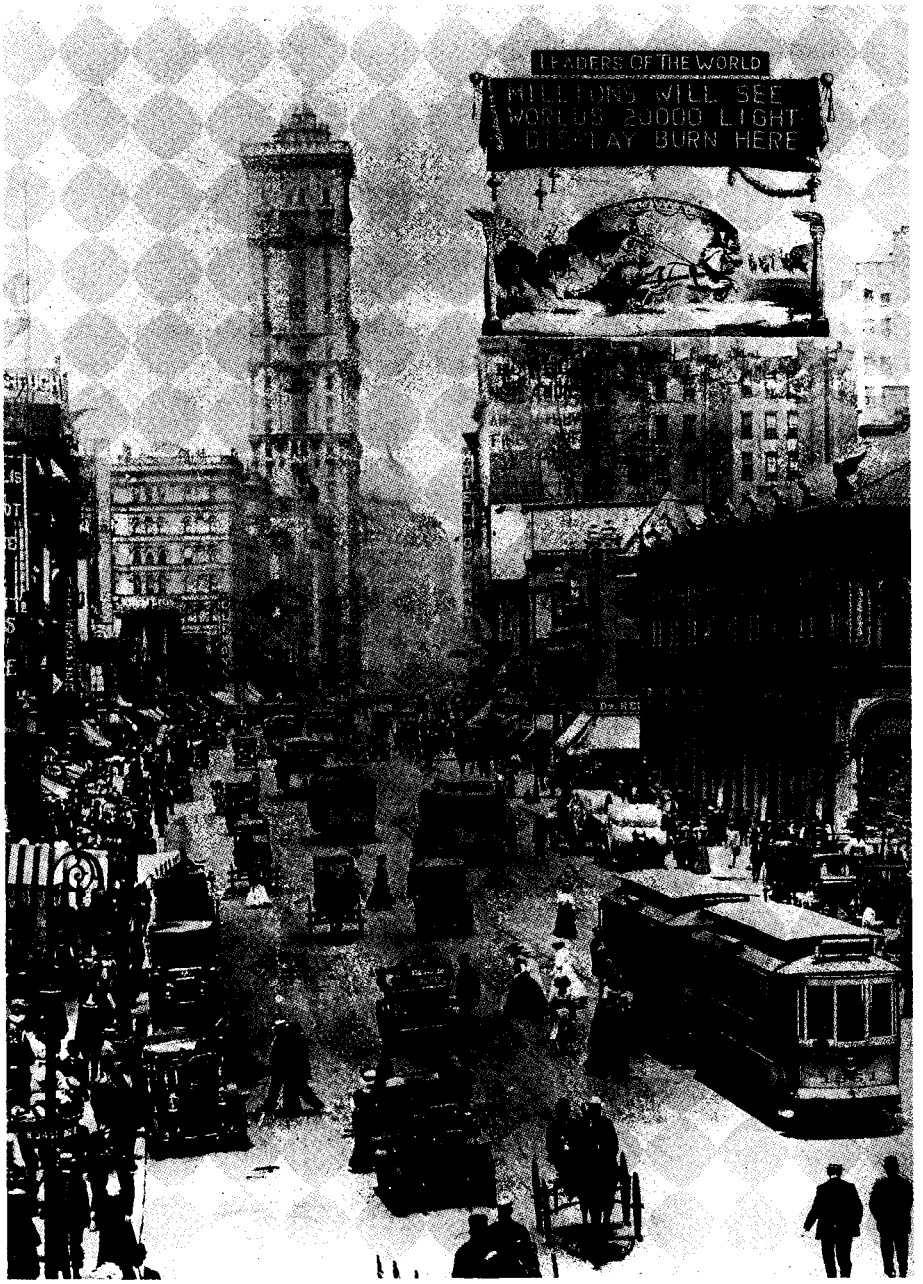

New York's Herald Square, c. 1910. To young Amory Blaine, the protagonist of This Side of Paradise, *"romance gleamed" from the Fiery Chariot Race sign, with its twenty thousand flashing lightbulbs. For today's readers, a scholar editing the collected works of F. Scott Fitzgerald must explain the sign's special allure.*

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Annotating Mr. Fitzgerald

JAMES L. W. WEST III

Anyone who has written historical notes for a scholarly edition has learned to spot "glossable" references in contemporary texts. Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Unbound*, for example, will someday need annotations about the quiz-show scandals of the 1950s and about Charles Van Doren and Herbert Stempel, contestants whose lives were ruined by the disclosures. Don DeLillo's *Underworld* will require a description of Truman Capote's Black and White Ball, along with some information about J. Edgar Hoover's cross-dressing and his liaison with Clyde Tolson. Lee Smith's novels will need identifications of Post Toasties and of Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs (whose big hit song was "Stay"). And according to Alex Ross, in a review in *The New Yorker* of Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama*, readers in the distant future (should anyone still be reading Ellis) will need a flock of footnotes to identify the novel's multitudinous quasi-celebrities. The public exposés and glitter events and rhythm-and-blues bands and minor celebs that turn up in these narratives will all have been forgotten, or will be so imprecisely remembered as to need annotation.

That's the position I find myself in as the editor and annotator of the Cambridge edition of F. Scott Fitzgerald's writings. Fitzgerald was an author grounded in his times, and his narratives are packed with references to contemporary politicians, sports figures, theater impresarios, movie queens, criminals, monarchs, and war heroes, not to mention restaurants and cabarets in the New York of the twenties, plus places and people of interest in Europe, after he went there in 1921. His works are also pep-

James L. W. West III, Distinguished Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, is General Editor of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of F. Scott Fitzgerald. His most recent book is *William Styron: A Life*.

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pered with the names of other writers, serious and popular, and with titles and quotations from their stories and poems.

He knew where everything was at Princeton (or at least where it had been before the war), and in his early writings he frequently moved his characters across that campus. He set other early fiction in central Manhattan of the teens and twenties, at Tiffany's and Brooks Brothers, Delmonico's and the Yale Club, the Vanderbilt and the Plaza and the Waldorf-Astoria—and at a great many other places that have long since vanished from the New York scene. And toward the middle of his career, he set some of his best short stories in his hometown of St. Paul, Minnesota, as it had existed during his boyhood, from about 1900 to 1912.

The humble editor is thus presented with some problems. How much of this needs to be identified and explained? For whom should it be glossed? How thoroughly should it be annotated? Does one engage in literary interpretation, pointing out how references and allusions fit and function in the stories, or does one give only the facts? Deciding what and for whom and how much to annotate causes some serious head scratching.

First, how much needs to be identified? How much do people really need to know? For example, do readers need to be told about the chariot-race sign on Broadway, mentioned in chapter 1 of *This Side of Paradise*? It's safe to say that people who read the novel today have no idea what the chariot-race sign on Broadway was. Most of these people, all the same, probably read the novel with normal comprehension, understanding the major themes, characters, and motives. Perhaps they don't really need to know about the chariot-race sign.

But the reference does matter, and learning what Fitzgerald had in mind when he used it does add something to one's understanding of the story. Amory Blaine, the protagonist of *This Side of Paradise*, sees the sign during a trip to New York City during his first year at St. Regis', an eastern prep school at which he is unhappy. The boys there have ostracized him for his vanity and self-absorption, and he is a pariah. Amory goes to the city in February to see George M. Cohan in *The Little Millionaire*, a rags-to-riches musical on Broadway. Amory has been in New York before, but always during the day. "This time he saw it by electric light," the narrator tells us, "and romance gleamed from the chariot-race sign on Broadway and from the women's eyes at the Astor."

One understands about "the women's eyes at the Astor," but why should "romance gleam" from a sign? What was special about this particular sign? Some digging reveals that the chariot-race sign was the largest and most famous of the newfangled electric signs then being erected in Manhattan. It sat atop the Hotel Normandie at 38th and Broadway, overlooking Herald Square. Inspired by General Lew Wallace's best-selling novel, *Ben-Hur*, the apparatus was formally titled "The Fiery Chariot Race

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in New York." Measuring sixty by ninety feet, it depicted the famous race from the novel, with horses and chariots and charioteers speeding around an arena at a furious gallop—an illusion created by rapidly flashing colored lights. Dust whirls rose from beneath the horses' hoofs, and flames belched from braziers at either side, giving a lurid glow to the surrounding area on Broadway. Usually there was a crowd of tourists at the spot, gawking up at the bright tableau. It was written about in newspapers and magazines, and journalists were fond of noting details about its workings. It employed some twenty thousand lightbulbs that flashed twenty-five hundred times a minute; it contained seventy thousand electrical connections and half a million feet of wire.

But "The Fiery Chariot Race in New York" did more than entertain tourists: it was first and foremost an advertising vehicle. One could rent time on the sign, which flashed out a series of advertising slogans along its top, the whole sequence of ads taking about ten minutes from start to finish. Thus as spectators watched the chariots and charioteers, they were urged to buy this or that variety of toothpaste or hair oil, or a popular brand of auto tire or perfume or underwear.

I had fun collecting this information. I even found several photographs of the sign. It was a predecessor of the Camel cigarette sign that I recall from Times Square of the early sixties (it blew smoke rings—remember?) and of the enormous Calvin Klein billboards there in more recent years. But does the chariot-race sign have any significance in Fitzgerald's novel? I think it does. Here are some possibilities: When Amory sees it, he is miserable at St. Regis' and has come to the city for escape. The huge, flashing chariot-race sign must epitomize for him the glamour of New York, which both soothes and energizes him. He decides, then and there, to make his mark on the city. And it's significant that a few years later he'll try to score his success, initially, as a writer of advertising slogans, exactly the sort of verbiage that's flashing across the chariot-race sign.

Readers will recall that Amory's first and only employment in the novel is writing jingles at an ad agency. He fails at that job and, as a consequence, loses Rosalind Connage, the young woman he adores. She chooses wealth and social position over love, marrying a rich boy named Dawson Rider. This is the first statement in all of Fitzgerald's writings of one of his great themes: the authority of money, its power to subvert genuine love and human feeling. Because Amory has little money and cannot sell himself in the ad game, he cannot win the golden girl. What better symbol of commerce, early in the novel, than a looming, glittering, electric advertising sign on Broadway—paired in Fitzgerald's sentence with the alluring eyes of the women at the Hotel Astor?

Perhaps it's also important that the chariot-race sign took its inspiration from a phenomenally successful novel, *Ben-Hur*, since Amory has

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ambitions to be a writer. In fact, Amory's creator, Scott Fitzgerald, sitting in the attic of his parents' home in St. Paul and inscribing these words on his manuscript sheet, was trying to make his mark by writing a novel that would (and, in fact, did) enjoy a run on the best-seller lists, just as *Ben-Hur* had. And finally, for people who savor coincidences, it's interesting that Fitzgerald would later, while in Europe in the mid-1920s, become friendly with the screen star Carmel Myers and with other movie people in Rome who were filming the first version of *Ben-Hur.* He visited the movie set several times and used material from those visits in *Tender Is the Night.*

It's obvious that one can spin out the possible significance of one of these annotations to considerable length. But how much of this belongs in a scholarly edition? How much will Cambridge University Press allow or the reader need? If one has dug up the information, then the temptation is strong to put it all in—and to interpret it. My decision for *This Side of Paradise,* though, was to stick pretty much to the facts, giving details about the chariot-race sign but not mentioning Amory's job as a writer of ad copy or Fitzgerald's visits to the *Ben-Hur* movie set. Nor did I attempt in the annotation to present the chariot-race sign as a symbol of anything. However, as I prepared notes for the stories in *Flappers and Philosophers* and *Tales of the Jazz Age,* the two volumes that follow in the series, I changed my approach a little and began to slip in a few hints about how a reference might illuminate a passage. One must be careful not to explicate too much, not to cue the reader too insistently; but a little guidance can be useful.

How much can the editor assume that readers will know? It all depends on who those readers are envisioned as being. Is one annotating only for Fitzgerald specialists and people with Ph.D.'s in American literature? Surely not: Fitzgerald has a great many readers outside academe. Then should the audience be thought of as American readers only, or British readers as well? It makes a difference. Is the base audience composed of teachers and academics, or graduate students, or undergraduates? Or is one annotating for educated lay readers or, more broadly, for people all over the world who are interested in Fitzgerald's work? The answer, as I conceive it, is that one is annotating for all of these audiences simultaneously, and not least for the international readers, since Fitzgerald has quite large followings in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere.

However, editors who address such large audiences end up including rather many notes and identifications. This can get you in trouble with reviewers who want something to carp about and who fix on the issue of over-annotation. If you push the line and include, for example, a note identifying Woodrow Wilson, then you risk the ire of the reviewer who says: "Good lord, *everyone* knows who Woodrow Wilson was!" The truth, though, is that everyone doesn't. An informal questionnaire administered recently to some bright young Ph.D. candidates in American Lit revealed that all of

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them knew Wilson to have been a president of the United States, but only a third knew when he had been president, and none knew that he had been president of Princeton before he was president of the United States—which, of course, was what interested Fitzgerald. And there are surely many readers in Italy or Japan or India (significant markets for these Fitzgerald editions) who know even less about the twenty-eighth president of our country. Therefore, I glossed Woodrow Wilson and ducked.

If I catch some criticism, I'll have to decide how to respond. Some editors become genuinely irritated by complaints about over-annotation, and these editors strike back. One editor friend of mine, weary of grousing from British reviewers that he was annotating too much, included the following identification for a reference by his author: "Jesus Christ: Son of God; born Bethlehem, B.C. 00; died Jerusalem, A.D. 33." When challenged, my friend replied quite blandly that many of his poet's contemporary readers were Muslims or Buddhists and that they needed the help.

One must also consider the shelf life of these editions. One hopes that they will last for quite a long time, that they will reside in library stacks for at least the rest of the century, and that they will endure even longer in digital records, if paper-and-ink books eventually do disappear. One must therefore think ahead. How many readers in 2099 will be able to identify Woodrow Wilson, much less the chariot-race sign on Broadway? Not many.

Fitzgerald liked to make lists. Here's one I made of references in his writings that might need glossing. How many people today can identify Three-Finger Brown (a pitcher for the Cubs), Robert Hugh Benson (a Catholic apologist), Edward Carpenter (a British reformer), Ralph Adams Cram (the architect whose firm designed the collegiate Gothic buildings on the Princeton campus), Donald Hankey (a British soldier/author who served in World War I), Daniel Florence Cohalan (an American judge who favored revolution by the Irish), Lady Diana Manners (an English beauty used as a model by Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford), Gaby Deslys (a dancer known for her jewel collection and her romantic connections with royalty), or Anna Held (a headliner in the Ziegfeld Follies, famous for her milk baths)? They're all mentioned in Fitzgerald's early stories and novels. All were part of the daily skin-wash of journalism and celebrity gossip that flowed around and over his readers.

How about the following lobster palaces and rooftop restaurants in postwar New York: The Midnight Frolic, Devinières, Bistolary's, The Cocoanut Grove (not the nightclub from the fifties but the one from the twenties), the Palais Royal, Montmartre, and Sans Souci? Which of those nightspots were upmarket and which were downscale? In which one did Gilda Gray dance the shimmy? Did she invent the dance, or did Mae West? How, in fact, did one do the shimmy?

Where was Brooks Brothers located in 1914? Where on Fifth Avenue

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was Tiffany's in 1922? When did the Yale Club move to its present location at Vanderbilt and 44th?

Did Stonewall Jackson really suck on lemons during the battle of Chancellorsville? What was important about the battle of Château-Thierry, and what exactly was the False Armistice? When did Prohibition actually go into effect? Were Fatimas a variety of cigarettes or a brand of cookies? How did a cut-out muffler work, and what was a motometer? What was in bad taste about wearing "an extreme Empire gown" to a small-town dinner party? (Answer: too much décolleté.) What was special about Mae Murray's clothes? About Gloria Swanson's nose? Why was it a mark of high social status to have a Manhattan telephone number with a Rhinelander, Plaza, or Circle exchange? And what exactly was a Prince of Wales suit?

These things keep me awake at night. Here's another. What were the differences among the Floradora Girl, the Gibson Girl, and the Djer-Kiss Girl? All three appear in Fitzgerald's writings: all were models of female beauty between 1900 and 1925, but their images were quite different, and Fitzgerald mentions them to imply things about characters in his stories.

The Floradora Girls were popular on Broadway early in the new century. They appeared in the British musical *Floradora*, which opened in New York in 1900, and they epitomized a rather buxom ideal of female beauty. The Floradora Girls were six in number; they wore high-collared, frilly dresses and picture hats, and sometimes they carried parasols. At the high point of the show, they promenaded on stage with six swains in ascots and top hats, the group singing the hit song "Tell Me Pretty Maiden." Women in the sextette often had later successes in the theater, or married millionaires; one of the girls in the show, in fact, was Evelyn Nesbit, who caught Stanford White's eye and later snagged Harry K. Thaw.

The Gibson Girl was quite different. Most people probably know a little about her: she was the creation of the illustrator Charles Dana Gibson, whose pen-and-ink drawings of her appeared in the old *Life* magazine, in albums, on wall posters, and even on pillows and scarves. The Gibson Girl had upswept hair, aristocratic features, a long neck, and strong shoulders. Often she was pictured in a high-collared shirtwaist and long skirt, with a golf club or tennis racquet in hand. She represented something quite different from the Floradora Girl: the Gibson Girl was a newer woman, more arch and self-assured, slightly masculinized, confident of her place in society, and not much impressed by the young men who pursued her.

The Djer-Kiss Girl was something else again. She appeared in magazine advertisements for Djer-Kiss, a line of perfume and women's toiletries from Kerkoff of Paris. The Djer-Kiss Girl, as drawn by the artist Malaga Grenet, was epicene and nymphlike; often she was pictured applying cosmetics before a mirror. She was typical of one feminine ideal of the twenties; she

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The self-assured Gibson Girl represented a newer woman. A generation later came the Djer-Kiss girl, below. Her cosmetics accented her nymphlike charm.

Changing ideals of femininity, 1900–1925. Above, the Floradora Girls, whose hit song began, "Tell me, pretty maiden, are there any more at home like you? / There are a few. . . ." A few married millionaires.

had much in common with the dancer Irene Castle, of Castle Walk fame, who was trig and boyish, with a flat bustline, bobbed hair, and a well-powdered nose.

Fitzgerald mentioned the Floradora Girl or the Gibson Girl or the Djer-Kiss Girl quite deliberately in his stories and novels. Each mention adds to atmosphere or characterization, and each suggests a period of about eight or ten years during which that girl was a model for female beauty. Fitzgerald must have been confident that his readers would pick up the references, and of course they would have in the 1920s, but they might not today. That's where the scholarly annotator must step in.

Where does one find the information for these notes? Anywhere and

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everywhere—in encyclopedias and reference books, if one is lucky, but often it's necessary to locate old Baedekers or to find maps and train schedules from eighty years ago. One must travel to libraries—frequently to the New York Public Library (both the main branch at Fifth and 42nd and the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center), or to the Mudd Library at Princeton, where the university archives are kept. One telephones college alumni associations or pages through art books in search of period advertisements. Sometimes one hires researchers in Long Island or Minnesota to look through historical society records, or one orders sheet music for popular songs of the teens and twenties. And endlessly, it seems, one spools through microfilm reels of the *New York Times*.

Sometimes it feels like donkey work, faintly absurd and a little déclassé. Editors who annotate John Milton, for example, get to write learned notes about biblical scripture and English history, about the Smectymnian Controversy and the Manichaean Heresy. An editor of Fitzgerald, by contrast, must summarize the plot of *Mary Ware, The Little Colonel's Chum* or explain how a detachable collar worked or tell how to play double-dummy mah-jongg.

There are plenty of intellectually respectable allusions in Fitzgerald: I've written glosses for Heraclitus, Hume, and Bergson; for Samuel Butler, Samuel Pepys, and Samuel Johnson; for Byron, Tennyson, and Wilde; for Renan, Bourget, and Verlaine; for Trotsky and Kerensky; for the two Aaron Burrs, father and son; and for Black Jack Pershing and Light-Horse Harry Lee (a Princeton alum). But nearly any academic can write competent notes on these figures. It's a considerable challenge, on the other hand, to gloss a tune like "I Ain't Gonna Give Nobody None o' This Jelly Roll," a 1919 ditty made famous by Sidney Bechet and His New Orleans Feet Warmers. (And do I explain the double entendre in the title?)

Speaking of double entendre, a good deal of it is created by the changed meanings of words and phrases that Fitzgerald used in the twenties and thirties. When he describes a fifteen-year-old charmer, in one of the Basil Duke Lee stories, as "a veteran of many affairs," he naturally means flirtations. Must the plodding editor explain this? And what about the prom-trotter in Fitzgerald's famous tale "May Day" who, at a Yale alumni dance at Delmonico's, is "kissed once and made love to six times" before midnight? Try to gloss that one without appearing foolish.

There are compensations, though. Preparing these annotations gives one new respect for Fitzgerald's range of knowledge, which extended from serious literature and philosophy to European and American history to contemporary politics to popular music and dance to the Broadway stage. Some of his allusions in his early works, especially in *This Side of Paradise*, are faked, but he was young when he wrote that book. As he grew older, he read and traveled and became a good deal more sophisti-

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cated. He turned into a magpie, picking up a great array of knowledge and experience and using it in his fiction. These annotations allow one to track his intellectual progress.

Why perform this labor? Whom does it serve? One hopes that it helps readers, that it enlarges their understanding of the novels and stories of this fine writer. Full sets of annotations are printed in the Cambridge hardcover editions, and shorter versions are included in the Scribner paperbacks of the major texts. The notes are for readers everywhere and are meant to accomplish what such notes have always been intended to do: to help re-create the social and popular milieu of a time, to identify literary allusions, to explain forgotten manners and mores—to give access to the mind and the times of the writer who created these narratives. The notes will point scholars and biographers in new directions; they will give critics different things to talk about. And the notes will be helpful to teachers, who can use them to add color and detail to their lectures—or to show off.

There are important cruxes in Fitzgerald's texts—the dash at the end of *This Side of Paradise,* for example, or the orgastic/orgiastic variant in *The Great Gatsby,* or the two versions of *Tender Is the Night*—but speaking generally, one doesn't find the kinds of editorial interference or bowdlerization in Fitzgerald that one finds in Dreiser, Faulkner, and Hemingway. It might turn out, then, that the major contribution these Cambridge editions will make to the study of Fitzgerald, besides gathering all of his writings in one series, will be to annotate them thoroughly—to re-create, as successfully as such efforts can, the intellectual and social world of Mr. Fitzgerald.

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Biography of a Rented Space

MALCOLM FARLEY

Little tumbleweeds of dust roll past us on the floor.
The sun pours through the open window

as it always does this hour in the early afternoon.
We've come for the few last things: the goldfish

in his gleaming bowl; the Folger's can we keep the pliers in;
a jar of marmalade, thick-cut and tart; the broom.

Our smell, that indelible spice the walls soak up
from years of sloughed-off life, has faded

after only one day's absence. When I was eight,
my family moved to a new stone house a mile away.

I wished then that I'd dreamed the whole upheaval,
and would wake once more in my old room by the stairs,

the morning burning on my windowsill,
the house still breathing softly at its earliest hour.

Malcolm Farley is curator of the Jefferson Market Library Reading Series for the Publishing Triangle. His poems have appeared in the *Antioch Review*, the *Paris Review*, and other journals.

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Straw Men

An Exercise in Virtual Unreality

DOUGLAS BLACK

On October 7, 1998, a mountain biker in the sagebrush hills east of Laramie, Wyoming, spotted what he thought was a scarecrow lashed to a buck-rail fence. As he drew closer, he saw blood. Not long afterward, Matthew Shepard, a gay college freshman who had been bludgeoned with a pistol butt by two young men he had met in a local bar, was flown to Fort Collins, Colorado, for emergency medical care.

Three days later, while Shepard lay in a coma in Poudre Valley Hospital, the students of nearby Colorado State University held a homecoming parade before the Rams' football game against the University of Tulsa. The parade's theme was *The Wizard of Oz.* The Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity and the Alpha Chi Omega sorority had submitted plans for a joint float that would show a victorious Ram gridiron scene, with a scarecrow in a Tulsa uniform. The university had approved these plans. However, as the group's pickup truck and flatbed trailer passed through the staging area, it was evident that little had materialized: the trailer was empty except for some crepe paper, a few balloons, and a handful of students. University officials, scrutinizing each float for potential offensiveness as it passed, may have been surprised that this one didn't match its approved design, but they saw no reason to stop it. They did not see the life-size scarecrow crumpled in the bed of the pickup, hidden by the side panels; even if it had been visible, they would likely have overlooked it, since the *Oz* theme had brought out scarecrows aplenty. This scarecrow, however, had "I am gay" spray painted on its face and "Up my ass" on its back, and it was

Douglas Black is a writer currently at work in upstate New York on a book about aviation history.

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about to create mayhem. It was pushed to its feet several times during the parade, sinking out of sight whenever it passed a spot where university officials were known to be watching. Thousands of spectators saw its ugly message up close. Several news organizations happened to be nearby as well, covering the local vigil for Matthew Shepard, and photos of the scarecrow appeared in newspapers across the country.

Matthew Shepard died two days later. Many of the articles reporting his death were accompanied by sidebars about the parade, noting that a university investigation was under way. Alpha Chi Omega declared that it had already expelled a woman who had ridden on the float. Pi Kappa Alpha issued a statement disavowing the graffiti, claiming it was "unauthorized vandalism" and announcing that it had suspended seven men who had traveled with the float. It became apparent that several fraternity brothers had been drunk for much of homecoming week and had vandalized other property as well. The university tried to explain how it reviewed and approved plans for parade entries, and the campus Greek organizations tried to distance themselves from the dozen or so students responsible for the homophobic display.

In the end, Alpha Chi Omega members voluntarily surrendered their charter, and the national organization agreed to close the chapter. Pi Kappa Alpha was suspended for a year by the university and disciplined by its national organization. Eleven students were assigned sanctions ranging from probation to suspension, with requirements for such activities as additional study and community service in order to regain good standing. The goal was to turn a shameful incident into an educational opportunity. But it was too late to restrain the responses that had already begun to spin out of control in cyberspace.

Over the following weeks, hundreds of telephone calls and nearly thirty-eight hundred e-mail messages poured into the office of the president of Colorado State University. I was working there as a staff member, handling presidential correspondence, institutional reports, and electronic communications. For days, three of us answered nonstop calls, letting people vent their anger, telling them we were appalled by what had occurred, and explaining that the university was taking the incident very seriously and making a full investigation. Most people simply wanted to raise reasonable voices to protest a terrible display of intolerance. Many were pleased we were willing to listen, and they appreciated the information we were constantly updating on our Web site. Some of them, however, assumed that because of the university administration's standard protocol for reviewing floats, the president had somehow okayed the plans for the scarecrow, and they were furious at him.

Some callers expected their complaints to be received by the president himself, even though the volume was far beyond any one person's

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capacity to handle. Some felt that in addition to returning their calls personally, the president should be holding the disciplinary hearings, teaching diversity-training sessions, speaking to the media twice a day, and visiting with the bereaved family of Matthew Shepard—on top of the usual everyday expectations that he oversee financial-aid awards, coach the football team's defensive line, and preside over campus parking-citation appeals.

Between calls, I managed to answer almost three hundred e-mail messages, until one person wrote to two dozen friends, embellishing the facts by claiming that the float was a detailed tableau of the Shepard crime scene, complete with fence and "beaten" scarecrow. Perhaps he thought the exaggeration would strengthen his argument, though it seemed to me the reality was shocking enough. Spotting the lines "Douglas Black, Office of the President, Colorado State University" at the bottom of my e-mail, he leaped to the conclusion that I was the university president, then passed this information to his friends, provided my e-mail address, and urged them to write to me. Now the Internet began to flex its muscle in earnest as the messages multiplied exponentially, many of them forwarded again and again among acquaintances and activist mailing lists, with parts of the original message appended. For a day or two at the height of the e-traffic, protests beeped into my computer once every minute.

In short order, our technology began to appear absurd. On the second day we resorted to a boilerplate response to incoming e-mails, but as the pace increased, I couldn't keep up even with that, especially since I was also responsible for posting updates on our Web site. On the third day we capitulated and decided to start using an autoreply mechanism, so that people could receive at least *some* response in addition to our Web address. That bought me enough time to answer a few individual questions and also to look for the more routine inquiries our office e-mail usually fields about academic programs, financial aid, research, and how to contact people on campus.

We found our software unequal to the task. It could reply automatically, but the response could have no more than 255 characters—barely three lines. We were forced to delete all but the most essential information from our outgoing message, removing the more courteous and personal language that we preferred. Immediately we started receiving additional complaints about the lack of human touch. I winced, knowing that those follow-up complaints received a second autoreply identical to the first. A few people worked themselves into a frenzy, insisting we stop sending them the same reply over and over, until they realized the only way out of the loop was to stop contacting us. As frustration rose and our communications grew more impersonal, we ached for better software, even though we knew it would do nothing more than hide the fact that a machine was doing the work that should have been done by a human being.

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Many of the messages were directed at the university in general: "Do you offer Hate 101?" "Glad to see bigotry is still alive and well in the classroom." "F——ing egghead Nazis." "Jackbooted assholes." "Taxpayers' money going for hate?" "Sorry I missed your clever little Hatecoming." "They are just as guilty of murder as Matthew Shepard's killers!" "Your Nazi-style parade." "I was going to attend law school there, but I've decided to study where the Klan doesn't get student-activity funds." (In fact, the university has no law school.)

Some of the messages were aimed at the university leadership, suggesting that the president should resign if this display of hatred was typical of the intolerant atmosphere on campus, or insisting that he was directly responsible for letting the offensive float enter the parade—despite the explanations we provided on our Web site about the students' evasion of the parade procedures and regulations.

As in a massive game of "telephone," the facts were mutating. The details of the parade float, the name of the fraternity, even the name of the victim strayed incrementally but steadily. Several hundred messages excoriated me personally. My name and position varied on a minute-by-minute basis. I was not only president of the university but also president of the student body and of the fraternity; I was one of the students who built the float. One woman announced she was so ashamed to share my last name that she was changing its spelling until I made a public apology.

At that moment there was much I regretted, but I couldn't tell of what exactly she thought I should repent. The tingling in my gut told me I'd know soon enough, and indeed, more specific messages quickly cleared things up. For example:

To: XMail@XMail@ACNS[<P——@hotmail.com>]PresOfc@President
From: <B——73@aol.com>
Cc:
Bcc:
Subject: (no subject)
Attachment: Headers.822

Mr. Black:

Obviously, your name is very fitting. You personally make me sick to my stomach with your disgraceful float. As for gays, my brother is gay and happens to be an OUTSTANDING human being. He is kind, generous, and apparently remarkably more intelligent than yourself. . . . Some day, you may be judged for being different. i.e.: having a small brain. Don't try to compensate for small body parts . . . by putting other people down to make yourself feel better.

Feel free to respond.

L——M——

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Some of my correspondents guaranteed me a special place in hell or promised to pray for the hatred in my soul. Some said "Are you out of your f——ing mind?" or "You are a sick f——," or "sig heil" [*sic*], or "Hey, sometimes I wonder why people like you are still living." Others sought to educate me on the politics of difference by means of detailed speculation on my personal shortcomings or psychopathology. Dozens were nothing more than strings of profanity, some just obscene subject lines without any text in the message bodies. One of these carried attached files that appeared to be software programs. I'm not certain how destructive they were, but the filenames looked ominous enough.

There were also threats of personal violence. I didn't know how seriously to take them. The day Matthew Shepard was found unconscious outside Laramie, I had driven my wife to Denver International Airport; she was leaving for a five-month job in the Antarctic, and while I was glad she wasn't subjected to the threats, I would have loved to talk all of this over with her. Can sending a virus into a university computer system be a valid act of protest? Can vandalism, obscenity, and intimidation really serve to advance understanding? Was I hearing the legitimate outrage of a wounded, bullied portion of our citizenry, or was it the general frustration of a whole nation at war with itself and beginning to split at the seams?

In a fit of weary disgust over a particularly vile attack by a user of a major Internet service provider, I forwarded the offensive message with a complaint of my own to the ISP Webmaster, asking that the response be sent to my personal e-mail address in order to avoid the autoreply we had set on our office account. Naturally, we received an autoreply, which triggered an answering autoreply from us, and the next morning, among the 530 other new messages awaiting me was an escalating series of automatic responses from successive levels up the ISP company's chain of command. The final one, from a company vice president, said the ISP had received a number of messages from my account and hoped my question had been answered.

My office computer responded with an autoreply.

That same week, in her *New York Times* column, Maureen Dowd mused about being a Washington journalist and shared some of the hate mail she had received. Reflecting on the anger that had been aimed at her personally, she concluded that many irate correspondents believe they are seeking redemption when what they really want is retribution.

Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun estimated that after the landmark Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973, he received thousands of letters, many calling him a murderer or comparing him to a Nazi butcher. At least his correspondents knew to whom they were writing. After the Columbine High School massacre in April 1999, many people who wished to berate the parents of the two young gunmen made calls or sent letters to

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numbers and addresses they had looked up in the telephone book. The parents of Dylan Klebold, however, had an unlisted number, and a family that had the misfortune of having the same name—and a listed number—found themselves in the target zone. Something similar happened to a man named Mike Schell, who happened to share a name with a much-publicized alumnus of Denver's Metropolitan State College. The newsworthy Mr. Schell had claimed that his alma mater should have warned him that he couldn't get a decent job with a major in English, and he therefore refused to repay student loans totaling more than twenty thousand dollars. He was lucky enough to have an unlisted number. The unnewsworthy Mr. Schell was not so lucky, and he was heaped with misdirected abuse.

Mistaken identity happens all the time. Vigilantism, too, has a long history in the United States. As for going off half-cocked, we have a constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech, which can include setting up a ten-story straw man just to make sure a protest appears justified. "By the code of [our] therapeutic culture," the journalist John Leo has observed, "if a person feels affronted, then a genuine affront has taken place, even if the affrontee . . . misunderstood the situation or got the facts wrong." The power of such "affronts," real or imagined, is bizarrely magnified by electronic communication, in which messages take on lives of their own. For example, in 1995 several students at the University of Northern Colorado circulated a petition on the Internet exhorting people to fight a right-wing threat to funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, the Public Broadcasting System, and National Public Radio. It instructed recipients to sign and forward the petition, and requested that every fiftieth recipient send a copy to a UNC e-mail address. The responses clogged the university e-mail system and so overwhelmed one of the students that she reportedly left UNC after one semester. Four years later, though the feared legislation was long gone from the congressional agenda and the students were no longer on campus, the petition was still circulating energetically around the Internet, and the resulting e-mails were every bit as indignant as if the issue had still been real.

Like many of my colleagues on campus that October, I started spending entire days at the computer, doing none of my regular work, sorting and answering complaint messages, and trying to keep our Web site straight. It is no surprise that on one Friday afternoon, at the height of the uproar, I made a heroic string of small mistakes that added up to disaster: I uploaded a new page to our Web site in the wrong format, had to rewrite the code, deleted the wrong file doing the second upload, got rattled and replaced it with the wrong backup, deleted that, and discovered that, in my hurry, I'd boilerplated the new page from the only backup of our main page, which was now gibberish—and that I had

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accidentally destroyed the backup by saving the new page over it. Our whole Web site, to which our autoreply was directing fifty or sixty people every hour, was out of action. I finally managed to rebuild and correct everything, but it took a few hours. *If I only had a brain.*

My personal frustration was compounded by the fact that the role of target was a familiar one for me, even if the scale this time was beyond anything I could have imagined. Fourteen years earlier, as a college student, I had been an object of repeated homophobic violence. As long as I could remember, I had been quiet, bookish, unathletic, and fairly solitary, and therefore a likely victim. The result was sly gut-punches in the dorm hall, wheedling requests to "warm my hands for me," and human excrement left on my grandfather's beloved old Dodge Dart. That I wasn't gay wasn't the problem. The problem was the people who thought they had the right to persecute me for being different. A decade and a half after experiencing the very treatment to which so many vociferous correspondents were now reacting, I found myself forced back over the fence by the same illogic, the same intellectual brutality. The first time around, I was attacked by homophobes; the next time I was attacked by people who thought *I* was a homophobe; and the two experiences felt eerily similar. I sat glued to my keyboard, while out beyond the screen glow in the darkening autumn, I sensed dust in the air, wisps of straw settling around my silent desk.

And I wasn't the only target. As outraged messages about the incident flashed around the country, an employee of the University of Kentucky read an incoming e-mail that identified Alpha Chi Omega as the sorority involved. He inadvertently scrambled the Greek letters and urged many of his friends to direct protest messages to Chi Alpha Omega. Chi Alpha Omega is a small, co-ed Christian fraternity that hadn't even participated in our university's homecoming parade. Before anyone knew what had happened, *its* Web site and e-mail systems were swamped with hundreds of hits and protest messages. Fraternity members handled the situation with considerable grace, issuing a statement that they were pleased to have the chance to "get into a dialogue with people and try to spread love instead of hate."

Several months after the e-mails started, I finally tracked down the Web site of a major feminist organization that offered a form letter protesting the parade, which could be sent automatically to our university. I remembered the letter well, since more than two hundred people had used it. The site also contained an error-filled letter addressed specifically to me, clearly based on the misinformation that had circulated early on. When we contacted the organization, a spokeswoman claimed that she and her colleagues had done their best to check the facts before posting their letter. I didn't believe her.

I was particularly interested in a complaint message that arrived with

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all its previous forwardings complete, including the name of the man who had made the original misinterpretation of "Douglas Black, Office of the President." I backtracked through more than two thousand e-mails to find his address and sent him a chiding correction. He offered a rather handsome apology for confusing me with the president—tempered, alas, with his dashed hope "that the president of the University might have been thoughtful enough to sign the response letters."

The e-mails trailed off after about five months, but the horror of my memories continued to dog me. Through the careless reading, sloppy thinking, and plain malevolence of some ostensibly well-meaning activists, I had found myself vilified for a half-dozen different roles, none of which bore the slightest connection to the facts. The most savage attackers were those claiming to speak for tolerance. My personal e-mail account wasn't safe, and reading my own name mixed with so much violent language wore heavily on me. The foulness paraded across my desk and followed me home; the threats and outraged rhetoric entered my dreams. Endless lines of marching straw men, shedding slightly as they chanted, goose-stepped over a buck-rail fence in the sagebrush hills.

Cyberspace is a strange place, one where content can be more readily and rapidly divorced from form than it can in any other medium. Rumors have always traveled fast and far, but until recently, most of them passed by word of mouth or in writing. Only on the Internet can one person duplicate and forward information to scores of others so quickly, so cheaply, and with so little effort. The act requires no personal interaction, no discussion that might unearth faulty premises or logic, no pre-publication vetting process, no long-distance telephone bills, no tying up the fax machine for a multiple-recipient list. A couple of clicks and a few keystrokes suffice. And the ease with which people and organizations can be contacted creates the expectation of rapid and personal response, which can result in more information being thrown into the breach and misconstrued. While electronic communication pretends to facilitate communication—and indeed it can—it can also facilitate an uncritical frenzy of protest, an exercise in virtual unreality.

Matthew Shepard's parents will never get their son back. His killers will not likely leave the Wyoming State Penitentiary alive. The students who displayed the obscene scarecrow at our university won several opportunities to learn about the chaos that can be wrought in a couple of reckless minutes. Myself, I'm still considering who defines and controls reality in our "information age." I don't wish to conclude that it's the person with the largest electronic address book and the fastest modem connection, but I'm beginning to think it's possible.

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Let Me Count the Ways

DAN PINCK

During my youth, which lasted forty years or so, I devoured books; I had them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Inevitably, I had a fix on bookshops as well. In Great Britain, my Grand Tour was Bertman Rota's in London, Heffers's in Cambridge, Blackwell's in Oxford, and a hundred other shops on my book rambles. Later, in meandering middle age, I began dissecting books, reading again and again books that I'd read when younger, looking for all sorts of casual and irrelevant clues to explain their uniqueness and my enjoyment of them. Still later, I skirted the environs of knowledge in reading books about books with the bibliomanic rigor that allows a desultory scholar to read with a degree of *penetrative sympathy*, as the English critic Holbrook Jackson might have said (and indeed, did say), and thereby discover byways leading to further research.

How do I read a book? First, I read the first two or three paragraphs; next, if I like the cut of the writer's jib, I open the book in its middle and read a few pages, more if I'm impressed with what's happening. Then I play pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey with different sections of the book. If I like what I've read, I look at the index and table of contents. If I'm hooked on my snippets of searching, I'll begin the book on page 1 and read it through. I pay no attention to encomiums on the book jacket. Until lately, I ignored the acknowledgment section. But now that has changed.

Recently, I moved my reading from *Prefaces to Renaissance Literature*, a slim, graceful book by Douglas Bush, to *Frank Lloyd Wright*, a foundation stone of a biography by Meryle Secrest. After crediting a few scholars, Bush simply says, *These names revive my pleasant memories of the cordial hospi-*

Dan Pinck's latest book, *Stalking the History of the Office of Strategic Services*, has an acknowledgment-per-page index of .23. His most recent contribution to the SCHOLAR was "A. J. Liebling, A Writist at Work" (Winter 1998).

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tality of Oberlin College, the Claremont Graduate School and its associated Colleges, and the University of Rochester. The Secrest book, by contrast, is lush with pre- and post-text data, a who's who of an index, and a dense listing of names in eight pages of acknowledgments up front. Four main foundations and research centers are cited at the beginning of Secrest's acknowledgment section, followed by nineteen persons who receive *great gratitude.* Fourteen Wright descendants *who have been just as generous with their time* come next; then one hundred persons who gave *invaluable help,* followed by a layer of ninety-one institutions and organizations, including magazines, newspapers, art galleries, colleges and universities, public libraries, and theological schools, which all *helped in various ways.* Three researchers *went out of their way to track down elusive materials and did so with tremendous zeal*; Secrest acknowledges the contribution of her British agent and her editors at Chatto & Windus and Alfred A. Knopf; her husband *performed the inestimable service of listening.* There are 634 pages in her book (only 110 in Bush's), with a total of 388 acknowledgments. The acknowledgment-per-page index is .62, with a margin of error of 4 to 6 percent.

I believed that within the scope of my acknowledgment research, Ms. Secrest might have set a record. Determined to find out if this were so, I selected a bag of hefty books, with the assistance of Helen Ashmore of the West Tisbury, Massachusetts, public library (which I warmly acknowledge). Here's what I found: Bernard Crick's biography of George Orwell, a 473-page book, presents one *must thank,* thirteen *wish to thanks,* one *untiring practical helpfulness,* and 128 persons cited for *precise help.* The acknowledgment-per-page index is .32, with a margin of error of 2 to 3 percent. David McCullough's 1,117-page biography of Truman, with 184 acknowledgments, has an index of .16, with a 3 percent margin of error. With one *profound thanks* and eighty-five *wish also to thanks,* Brendan Gill's 544-page biography of Frank Lloyd Wright has an index of .16, with a 1 percent margin of error. In her biography of Georgia O'Keeffe, Roxana Robinson identifies eighty-seven persons and institutions who provided *generous assistance,* and whom she *cannot thank sufficiently.* The acknowledgment-per-page index of the 639-page book is .17.

One bag of books is hardly sufficient for a quantitative research study; I went back to the West Tisbury library and gathered another haul of fat books. Joseph Blotner acknowledges the help of only ten persons in his 778-page biography of William Faulkner (an index of .01). Matthew J. Bruccoli had a respectable index of .18 in his biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald—only 131 persons cited in his 732-page book. In Virginia Spencer Carr's 600-page biography of Carson McCullers, I counted 633 persons, including twelve linguists who received *thanks* for tracking down foreign materials; other groups garnered *with their help, grateful,* and *especially indebted* citations. The index is 1.08. As might be expected of an

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egocentric military person, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery in his *History of Warfare,* a 584-page paean to Churchill, Thucydides, and himself, acknowledges the aid of only fifteen persons, including *Miss Bunney, who typed the chapters—and some of them more than once.* Hail to Miss Bunney.

The help of 795 persons, including 100 editors, writers, and reporters, is acknowledged in Kitty Kelley's *Nancy Reagan: The Unauthorized Biography.* The index of this monster book—the highest in my survey—is 1.3, with a margin of error of 8 to 12 percent. Six literary agents are cited, along with three lawyers and a person who researched telephone books. In a prime example of the political opposition research approach to biography, Kelley notes the following sources from which she received help: FBI files, IRS returns, presidential documents, letters, diaries, calendars, and financial disclosures.

An essayist I know puts acknowlegments in the same category as giving generous tips—but with Monopoly money. Unlike a few teachers, he has not listed, and never will list, his students in his acknowledgments. Even though it might be the right thing to do, I don't believe that I ever did, or ever would, follow the example of Robert Kiely, who credited a few of his students in his book *Reverse Tradition: Postmodern Fictions and the Nineteenth Century Novel*:

> *Among the extraordinary Harvard undergraduates with whom I have worked on narrative fiction in honors tutorial, I want especially to mention Jason Vincz, who copyedited the text and made numerous helpful suggestions; Bonnie MacDonald, with whom I carefully read Toni Morrison; Jeffrey Rosen; Alex Rose; Robert Tobin; and Melissa Weissberg, who spent her senior year navigating between Beckett and Wittgenstein.*

Ouch. I wouldn't mention Wittgenstein, either.

I shifted down through byways of books and found a few in which dogs, cats, horses, and lions—all with names—are acknowledged for their help and friendship at critical junctures. Secretaries, proofreaders, and wives come at the end of most acknowledgment sections. Husbands generally are a few lengths from the end. Husbands are thanked for *listening,* wives for being *supportive* and *long-suffering.* I was curious to discover if there is a correlation between the number of acknowledgments in books on the same topic. Take Churchill. William Manchester's 973-page biography, *The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill: Visions of Glory, 1874–1932,* lists 128 persons to whom Manchester feels indebted, with an index of .13. Manchester cites Martin Gilbert twice. In *Churchill: A Life,* Martin Gilbert is *grateful* to sixty-nine persons and *most grateful* to three. His book—1,066 pages (did he plan it so it would be exactly that length, and all that?), with an index of .06—doesn't lob an acknowledgment back to

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Mr. Manchester; but he does cite, in the last sentence, his indebtedness to his wife, Susie.

Books about espionage seem to be stingy with acknowledgments—and for good reason. Without mentioning names, writers of espionage books that slide into the pile of history, according to the writer's definition, have an acknowlegmental field day in obfuscation and pretentiousness. The absence of names lends verisimilitude or fictive resonance to their stories, depending on the reader's sensitivity and gullibility. In his book *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981–1987*, Bob Woodward advises us that his information came from interviews *with more than 250 people*, but he can't tell us who they are. *I would prefer sharing the name and position of each source with the reader*, he says. *But because of the topic's sensitivity, nearly all the interviews were conducted on "background," which means that I have promised that these sources will not be identified.* So be it; and what an out. In the introduction to Nigel West's *The Circus: MI5 Operations 1945–1972*, I looked for acknowledgments and found none, not even undisclosed persons whose names West couldn't divulge. In place of names, I found a statement that takes the place of a hundred acknowledgments: *This final version of* The Circus *is the most detailed account of MI5's work ever published, or ever likely to be.* Now there's a publisher who knows how to have its author's work acknowledged.

Dave Eggers's recent memoir, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius,* offers an acknowledgment section that is either staggering or heartbreaking, depending on your point of view. It is a 21-page amalgam of Dadaism, Pop, MTV, *MAD Magazine*, and *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour.* In an attempt to calculate an index, I tried to isolate and identify the persons, places, and things being acknowledged. I failed. But it did not escape my notice that Eggers cites the distinguished senator from Massachusetts; Palestinian statehood; and Nicole Graev, *who has her vowels transposed but is otherwise very nice.* In addition, *The author wishes to acknowledge the existence of a planet just beyond Pluto*; however, *his older brother Bill is not singled out because he is a Republican.*

Is there nothing new of value on the gratitude front? Of course there is. Christine Wiltz's recently published *The Last Madam: A Life in the New Orleans Underworld* is, in its acknowledgment section, a model of precision and directness. Here's how she handles a citation: *A very special thanks to my researcher extraordinaire, Noel A. Ponthieux, who also acted as a detective and got the goods on the elusive madam, her associates and her adversaries.* That's plain language in any language. Thank you very much, Ms. Wiltz.

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"Xers" vs. "Boomers"

A Contrived War

MARGARET MORGANROTH GULLETTE

. . . and the children's teeth shall be set on edge.
—Ezekiel 18:2

Soon after our son graduated magna cum laude from Harvard in 1991, he was fired from a new job as a waiter. His employers told him he didn't smile enough. Having taken advantage of the recession to hire more young people than they needed, they had to expel some without cause. Our son was an adult with wide opportunities, but even so I lost my postmaternal cool.

Sean then moved to New York to launch an independent magazine, begin a writing career, and support himself with "day jobs." His struggles gave us a window—a big, drafty window—on the hand-to-mouth life of the 1990s job market. He worked evenings making cold calls as a telemarketer; he freelanced as a content-provider (the belittling new Internet word for *writer*). Simultaneously he joined the growing army of "consultants" and began working for a temporary agency. Within six years, he had amassed 1099 forms from more than a hundred companies bent on outsourcing, none of which paid his Social Security or gave him either health benefits or a pension plan. In an allegedly flourishing economy, 30 percent of all American workers now have similarly contingent—"nonstandard"—new jobs: nonunionized contract or other short-term work, less security, diminished benefits, stagnant wages, short or nonexistent ladders. This degradation of work may turn out to be as profound an economic transformation as the Industrial Revolution.

Margaret Morganroth Gullette, a Resident Scholar in Women's Studies at Brandeis, is the author of *Declining to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of Midlife* and *Safe at Last in the Middle Years*. Her interdisciplinary essays on age and gender have appeared in many journals.

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Meanwhile, how is this new order being explained to us? Not, except in progressive circles, as a contestable trend in the treatment of workers; not as "the race to the bottom" or as "class war from above." Instead, the rhetoric that is shaping the public record has depended heavily on the skillful deployment of two imaginary age categories, the "Boomers" and the "Xers."

During the Bush recession, when our son got fired, the media cannily invented the term *slackers,* which meant lazy, cynical young adults, apolitical whiners who were dependent on their parents and lacked the drive of "our" generation. Although this was classic victim-blaming, the term nonetheless spread from coast to coast. There were reports of parents berating their children for not trying harder to find work. (My husband and I, on the other hand, were telling our son to get more sleep and take a day off—poor palliatives for our rage at being unable to give him any real help.)

As soon as the recession was officially over, press coverage changed to defend the young, by now called "Generation X," or Xers. The writers published now were those who resented being called slackers. Slackerdom, they said, was a malicious myth or hoax. Although Xers were still discussed as if they had a single homogeneous character, that character possessed traditional American values and was capable of improving through time. Xers were quoted talking earnestly about growing up, wanting to marry, even—clinching proof that they were human—*investing.* We were told repeatedly how aggressive and successful they were. Indeed, the married fraction of the "Hard-Luck Generation" was christened DINKS—double income, no kids. A 1997 *Time* magazine cover story trumpeted war: "So boomers, beware. There's a whole bunch of kids with scores to settle. . . . Who would have thought the kids would start taking over so soon?"

When the recession tailed off, one might have expected the terms *Xer* and *slacker* to become as passé as shoulder pads. Instead, streams of articles about Xers continued to appear, intent on bringing justice to the allegedly still-vilified young.

But what if Xers are too exclusive a group to be synonymous with the young? When I asked fifty Brandeis students what they thought an Xer was, I found the connotations to be whiteness, maleness, skinniness, higher education; high-tech jobs, entrepreneurial victory; singleness, childlessness. Women with the same elite potential may be members of the club; so too "model Asians," gays, and upwardly mobile African-Americans. *Xer* does not seem to include crack sellers or fast-food servers, teachers or union organizers. Yet its claim to be scientifically encompassing, to represent a demographic cohort, is precisely what authorizes age generalizations.

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Now for the other side of the story. Eerily, as Xers became sympathetic individuals, journalists turned to maligning a group identified as Baby Boomers. Boomers are ever-present in Xer discourse as the Other. They exist without question. They, too, have a character, but not a perfectible one. Pictured as essentially greedy and self-righteous, unwilling to share, and reckless about the future, they hold the good jobs, gobble the perks, and dominate the media by harping on themselves. In contexts where power or income is the core attribute, the Boomer label ignores the members who were only four years old in 1968 but bulges out to include everyone in the middle years, including those between fifty and sixty-five, the category William Safire calls the "near-elderly." They're the plutocratic sellouts with dental plans and pensions. They're powerful but undeserving: deadwood.

Boomers—for those who have been living in Siberia—began as a neutral demographic term referring to a birth cohort that between 1946 and 1964 reversed the century-long decline in the birthrate. Now it is almost always used demagogically. Conservatives borrowed the term to belittle the "generation of '68," and soon the Boomers acquired a full pseudobiography. A *Boston Globe* article describes them as "idealistic longhairs" who became "yuppies" and are now "ready for the glory days of the menopausal and the bald." Boomers, like Xers, are usually imagined as male, white, and overprivileged. They're Bill Gates; they're not women or minorities or homeless schizophrenics. These strategic omissions have the effect of making all middle-aged people appear rich and powerful. They can thus be more easily objectified as secure rule makers and oppressors of the young. They are a patriarchal group, ergo, intent on playing out—to borrow the words of psychoanalytic theorist Kathleen Woodward—"the oedipal familial logic of struggle and recrimination": a Goliath to the Xers' David.

Boomers haven't changed over the 1990s—except to get older. Since 1984, when the youngest were only twenty, they have been labeled "the aging Baby Boomers." A "Talk of the Town" piece in *The New Yorker,* once again ignoring the then thirty-four-year-old end of the cohort, blithely asserted, "Now, in 1998, every baby boomer is middle-aged"; death is "a major item" on the Boomer agenda. (Boomers are reminded of their mortality more often than the Puritans were.) To younger workers, the label implies that this group may be unjustly rich but is on the verge of decline, powerful but not omnipotent: a Goliath that David can beat.

What I noticed—because our son was being shoved into Xerdom and his parents were being made perverse new characters in the social text—is that the media have been creating a war between the two age groups. In the guise of defending youth, they have been portraying midlifers as the enemy: a generation—as Betsy Israel wrote in the *New*

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York Times—that "sucked up too much of the oxygen" that Xers need.

"Defying stereotypes and misconceptions doubtless nurtured by insecure baby boomers," observed the *Washington Post,* "the twentysomethings on parade here are an idealistic and defiant bunch." Overtly, sentences like this praise the Xers; covertly, they stigmatize the Boomers. Reporters sic the young *qua* young against the Other by representing Boomers as bullies. Fight imagery prevails. *Fortune* asserted that "Boomers are more than willing to take on twentysomethings in what's shaping up as a generational grudge match." The *Dallas Morning News* noted, erroneously, that "the great bulk of what I find is commentary by Baby Boomers bravely attacking their brash youngers." In *13th Gen,* the first full-length book constructing the age war, Neil Howe and William Strauss asserted that the Xer phenomenon was a "one-sided assault from elders." However, neither they nor anyone else provided evidence of such an assault.

Perhaps because there was so little documentation of Boomer hostility, the tack changed from what Boomers said to what Xers felt they believed. A young writer named Beverly Bartlett asserted that Boomers "sneered at our McJobs." A *Newsweek* writer "reported," on the basis of no national survey: "It's hard to find an Xer who doesn't believe that . . . the baby boomers see them not as human beings but as disposable incomes in sneakers, and that all this Xerbashing is just another boomer power trip." They're *told* how they feel. "They hate baby boomers, and they're sick unto death of reading about them," the *Utne Reader* editorialized. As a menace to the young, Boomers have to be fought.

Since the articles don't appear to be *about* the elders, fairness doesn't demand that malice toward them be denied or qualified. Few writers today feel the need to point out that the Boomers are also too heterogeneous to have a single character or to wield their alleged power in a unified way. Many social scientists also ignore their diversity. Why should pollsters lump thirty-six-year-olds together with fifty-four-year-olds? Preposterous as some of the generalizations are, they have made their way into tabloids and weeklies, major monthlies, mainstream newspapers, fiction, and everyday speech. Some editors are manipulating the war for political ends; others are attracting niche advertising or simply supporting the Xers out of youth solidarity. Age difference has been made more than respectable; its use as a weapon is conventional wisdom. People in their twenties who praise aspects of the midlife generation and use categories besides age in their thinking about the Xers (David Greenberg in *Next* comes to mind) are a subdued minority. The feminist press publishes articles about crossing age borders, but feminists regularly use the terms *second wave* and *third wave,* markers of excess difference, without noticing the overflows from the age war.

The media have been compelled to notice the war they created. In

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one of the war's rare critiques, Matthew Grunwald noted in the *Boston Globe* that "if Lizzie Borden repeated her hatchet job today, we would undoubtedly be deluged with think pieces featuring the ax as a metaphor for Generation X's disenchantment with baby boomers." But the level and effects of the warfare have been minimized by being lightly termed "Boomer-bashing." Their true seriousness is suggested by the fact that the terms *Boomer, Xer,* and *Social Security* constantly appear in combination: in one two-year period, I found 282 such articles—an induced panic. A friend of our son snaps at me, "I pay 15 percent into FICA, but Social Security won't be there for *me*." I'll wager he has read some of those articles. Peter G. Peterson, a banker who long ago started using the age war as an argument for privatizing Social Security, predicted "ugly generational conflict" once our children "understand the size of the bad check we are passing them." The *New York Times Magazine* tried to diminish the sense of danger in 1995, but by 1999, Charles McGrath imagined "impoverished 20- and 30-somethings massed outside the gate" of a deluxe early-retirement community, "tennis rackets and Big Berthas in hand," unwilling to "foot the bill."

According to the late Robert Eisner, once president of the American Economic Association, the Social Security "crisis" manufactured by the right wing was never plausible; there is none looming in the future. People in their peak earning years are instead providing Social Security with alluring surpluses for the first time in its history—the direct cause of attempts to privatize. But the media argument—that the Boomers will somehow eat up the Xers' secure retirement—constructs the young as a cohort that should be atomistically and defensively for itself. This stance is a useful tool for anyone who wishes to kill the major remaining social insurance programs and split family solidarity on other issues.

Boomer-bashing insidiously preps the young to believe that another righteous response is economic competitiveness—against elders as bosses. Midlife people with jobs can be represented as useless. A younger character in Doug Coupland's *Generation X* says bitterly, "You'd last about ten minutes if you were my age these days, Martin. And I have to endure pinheads like you rusting above me for the rest of my life." Imagined as a class of employers, Boomers can be represented as responsible for management by the numbers, for downsizing, and for shipping jobs overseas. They are not seen as members of a midlife generation vulnerable to having their wages cut at their peak. "The overworked American" is a broad trend, as the Harvard economist Juliet Schor has shown. Yet in a recent article in *Modern Maturity* (published by the American Association of Retired Persons, which should know better), Mark Hunter is allowed to state without evidence that "Baby Boomers, who came of age shouting their contempt for the man in the gray flannel suit, have done more than any other generation to erase the line between work and private life."

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The implication is that only younger people suffer from 24/7 and other deteriorations of working conditions. Name any such failure, and it can be blamed on Boomers rather than seen as the next wave of capitalism's power over labor.

One result of this attitude is that economic revenge appears just. "Let's yank away your cushy day job, your dictaphone and your dental insurance," Ian Williams was trapped into snarling in *13th Gen.* But what if the "aging Boomer" who loses that job, that dictaphone, and that dental insurance is somebody's parent? A striking 1997 Roz Chast cartoon showed three Father's Day cards to be sent by children with jobs to their unemployed fathers. The first says, "You always thought I was such a slob, / Well, guess what, Dad? I got your job." The second says, "I'm working full-time, you're still lookin'." The third says, "Here's an idea / Hope you won't be resistant: / I'll hire you, Dad, / As my personal assistant!" Presumably these are sons, not daughters, who are allowed to voice such nonchalance, resentment, glee at humiliation, and fantasies of replacement. And it's their fathers, not their mothers, who have lost their jobs. Younger male–older male generational competition used to be conceived sexually, as Oedipal. The age war reconceives it (and sanctions it) within the workforce.

No one could imagine boys jeering at their mothers on Mother's Day, even in jest. (Many current twentysomethings, girls as well as boys, were raised by single mothers. Many felt abandoned by their fathers and watched their mothers struggling. Even now, at their midlife peak, women earn only half as much as men.) With women omitted from the Boomer label, however, it becomes much harder to notice that mothers, too, have precarious work situations—and that some of them have younger bosses.

What is deadly serious—and may become even more serious in the future—is the staging of work scarcity. There's a standard case history that has sneaked into middle-class folklore. "The 50-year-old, $75,000-a-year-veteran executive who was right-sized out of a company and replaced by a 28-year-old, $30,000-a-year, fresh-out-of-college MBA graduate is not a rare species in today's economy," declared a writer in the *Orange County Register.* In other words, the conventional wisdom is that a young person can get a job only if a middle-aged person loses one. "First Boomer" Bill Clinton confirmed the job-swap myth at a commencement ceremony last year when a student yelled out, "I need a job!" and the soon-to-retire president replied, "Well, you'll be able to get one now." Out of age solidarity and self-absorption, younger people can be nasty even when midlifers do lose their jobs. In *The Cliff Walk,* a memoir about how his college teaching career ended when he was forty-one, Don Snyder reports that a male student let him have it: "Man, not another baby boomer out of work. . . . Every time one of you guys loses his real job you take the crap jobs at Blockbuster and the mall so I can't even pick up summer

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work." In college, almost-adult children may use war language, but with compassion. A woman undergraduate once told me sorrowfully, "When my father lost his job last year, I said, 'Daddy, I don't want to have to compete with you!'"

From a family perspective, a parent's job loss is devastating, even to adult children who are employed. Does it make sense, if the American economy were unable to produce enough good jobs for all, for any member of a family to prefer to exchange a parental salary for an Xer salary? In another kind of labor market, this would be called scabbing. The job-swap myth diverts our gaze from the reasons for our problems, just as the supposed perks of Boomers—like dental plans—are treated as unjust in order to conceal the ways in which working conditions are being eroded.

Despite the current trumpetings of American prosperity, economic declines have to be explained somehow. Male-female competition, black-white competition—all such binary perspectives put the blame on workers for failures that are systemic. Now the explanations have been moved into an additional arena, that of age. The Boomer-Xer age binary brings scarcity into the heart of the family, where (when not treated as a joke) it operates openly and sadly—as if midlife unemployment had always been a part of the economy and the young had never been able to get jobs unless their parents lost them.

I believe we must become warier—about using the terms *Boomers* and *Xers,* about how age cohorts are constructed, about manufactured generation gaps, about age-related language in general. My subject here is the politics of the representation of age. I'm not examining one specified "age class," as critics so often do (I call that the "slice-of-life" approach). I'm looking at how the age war was created and, if it is not ended, what its consequences may be.

Does anyone take the age war seriously? Do real people repeat the stereotypes and scapegoating—the middle-ageism—they've read and heard about? In the absence of wise age-oriented research, it's hard to know. But in some cases, the answer is: word for word. An editor of the Simmons College student newspaper wrote, "Older generations look at Generation X as somewhere between a nuisance and a nightmare." Some of our friends' adult children repeat how easy we had it when we were young. They're holding an age group responsible for the rightward trend that led to declines in federal and foundation scholarship aid, housing starts, and job creation; for the managerial trend to nonstandard work; for the weakening of seniority systems in unions and academe; and for changes that no one controls. My friend Linda reports that her twenty-five-year-old daughter told her, accusingly, "You had sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll, and all we have is AIDS."

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Family resentments get tied to the language provided by the war. The psychological anthropologist Thomas Weisner interviewed "the children of the children of the '60s" in California, where many people in the counterculture settled and raised families. He found that some adolescents who had been hurt by their fathers, though they preferred not to call themselves Xers, did use the generational label "Boomer" to explain behaviors they condemned: divorce, alcoholism, drug use. (Think of Kevin Spacey in *American Beauty.*)

In the workplace, age differences harden attitudes. One younger man argued in a letter to the *Boston Globe* that women didn't have workplace problems; *he* did, "because many of the people I work with have children who are my age." If job milieus are conceived as ideally young, it may come to seem odd to have midlife workers around. People in their twenties are learning to think of themselves, united by age, as the collective that matters. And they are learning what emotions they are allowed—or even supposed—to feel toward the middle-aged: estrangement, resentment, anger, vengeance.

By now, the media can publish hate speech that would be unthinkable in other oppositional contexts. The young woman who said the Boomers sneered at her McJob imagined their future in chilling terms, as "pioneers . . . in these last few battles [retirement, deteriorating health, death]. If it's true, if they have paused here to catch their breath, I can't say that I'm disappointed to see them humbled." Writer Rosie DiManno complains, "You are old. You are wrinkled. You sag. . . . You've had a lifetime of being at the centre of the universe. . . . What next? Sex and senility? A hip-to-be-dying movement?"

The subtext is parricide. As I said, parricide is no longer sexual. It isn't even, exactly, a murder wish. Adult children cannot wish their midlife parents dead for their money or their jobs. No, this is a compromise formation, a miserable wish that people who are older-than-young not be there in the workforce. In order to understand how people in their twenties might unconsciously feel this way, let us remember that they are involved in two difficult processes simultaneously: forming new adult relationships with their parents after adolescence, and taking their first independent steps into the increasingly harsh capitalist system. Handling both of those tasks in the midst of the age war may be especially confusing and difficult.

These conflicts are only one unhappy face of what the cultural critic Raymond Williams called a new "structure of feeling." The other unhappy faces are those of people in their middle years. My friend Linda was saddened by her daughter's envy. When I was a guest on a Midwestern NPR show, a woman called in to declare, "I may be fifty, but I'm no Boomer, I'm no Yuppie." Hers was the kind of fierceness shown by people who feel that no one has been listening. Here, too, we need more evi-

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dence. (Who, in our youth-centered culture, interviews fifty-year-olds about the age war, honoring them as ethnographic subjects as they would honor people in their twenties?) Midlifers are not, however, as unhappy as I think they should be. Astonishingly, parents make no protest at being dumped into a despised age group and hounded off the stage of life. At readings I gave around the country, two middle-aged women and a man told the assembled crowds that "we" ought to give up our jobs so younger people can have them. They spoke not as self-interested parties in their own highest-demand years, or as activists angry about economic conditions, but solely as parents generously concerned about the future of struggling adult children. It would be easy (but wrong) to assume that Boomer-bashing comes only from our children—who in fact wouldn't want to hurt us—rather than from journalism, advertising, and business. In different ways, the Xer-Boomer age war picks off each generation separately and disables both of them.

Our son's hardscrabble twenties had one intellectual benefit: it taught us to see through the contrived age war between the Boomers and the Xers, and to see "in the name of the children" as a dangerous weapon that can be twisted flexibly—against the midlife, the workforce, and the future. Why did age warfare happen in the 1990s? My view is that Boomer-bashing explains grave economic changes in postindustrial capitalism in a way that reduces resistance to them. Many losses affect people of all ages who are below the top 10 or 20 percent economically, and these have been suffered for two decades: declines in real wages for men, employment security, and pension vesting; erosion of seniority systems; the rise in economic inequality; the loss of authority in such professions as teaching and medicine. By the 1990s, some of these trends were becoming undeniable.

Each group as it hits the job market must be resocialized from its adolescent pre-work orientation—the relative indulgence and cooperation of family life and (for those who go to college) the autonomy of academic life—into employment's steeper hierarchies and greater atomization, subordination, and insecurity. Work compensates for these losses with independent income and the anticipation of growing power. If work were to appear futureless, the young might resist. The mainstream press guides the transition so that newly minted adults will be compliant. In the 1990s, Xers were told that they suffered disproportionately from scarcity and would be the first generation doomed throughout their life course. They were also told that they knew it—always a ploy for encouraging assent. "And Xers believe their own press," reported the *Economist;* "75% think they will be worse off than their parents."

The war sometimes blames the griefs of the young on Boomers' behavior, and sometimes on their dumb luck in being first. Either way, it ma-

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nipulates history so that the economic stress doesn't seem shared. It controls how we are to interpret the bad news that however high the stock market soared in the bull market of the 1990s, and however many billionaires were produced, real wages and working conditions for most people are not as sweet as they were in the postwar years. The midlife generation is being scapegoated for history. This is a logical fallacy known as *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (after the Boomers, therefore because of the Boomers). Ignoring the power brokers of other ages, a *Chicago Tribune* writer declared, "The 77 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 are now 'it.' . . . There is nobody else to blame for whatever goes wrong."

Such blame prevents us from thinking about power and class by offering age as the dominant source of economic problems. Age manages many crises. It enables younger people who feel they cannot advance to attribute their woes not to the failure of meritocracy or the effect of weakening seniority, but to Boomer pigginess. Boomer envy deflects anger away from the members of their own cohort who have become millionaires overnight. It turns all of us rhetorically toward the "natural" world of generations (seen as cyclical, with a time to start work and a time to bow out) and the little world of the nuclear family (seen as rivalrous). There, the best that adult children can do to improve their lot is to wait with impatience, and the best that their midlife parents can do if they can't retire early is to survive with guilt.

By magnifying a youth crisis, the age war disguises a real midlife crisis—the income losses and midlife unemployment and underemployment that I have described in my book *Declining to Decline.* Policy experts say that many Boomers won't be able to retire. As Anne Monroe pointed out in *Mother Jones,* discrimination against the middle-aged is "the dark underbelly of downsizing." (Humiliated, many of the downsized pretend they have taken early retirement.) Tenure is under attack in schools and universities; unions and government, with their own seniority systems, are being challenged in different ways. Despite the Age Discrimination Act of 1967, and "disparate-impact" standards in all anti-discrimination law, some state court labor decisions now allow businesses to lay off midlife people *because* they cost too much. The experience of developed European countries over the last two decades suggests that dispatching midlife workers is slowly becoming postindustrial policy. Here, too, corporations and state and city governments are eliminating the (next) most expensive employees. This may not improve productivity, but it certainly pushes wages faster toward the bottom: it cuts off the top of a downsized person's age-wage curve. Statistics show that even college-educated men between forty-five and fifty-four, a once-privileged group, have been losing employment involuntarily. All this happens at the very time in the life course when people need to educate children or help them get a start in life, as

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well as to earn more for their own retirement and to take care of elderly parents. As middle-aged people who still have good jobs retire or are forced out, younger workers find that employers phase out the benefits and perks they used to offer. We didn't "eat" the goodies; so far we've been helpless to save them even for ourselves.

Middle-ageism minimizes or even justifies economic harms inflicted on people in their middle years. It grants to aging no experiential gains, nothing but losses: slower reflexes, memory loss, burnout, techno-retardation. At midlife, the unemployed rarely get equivalent work; they bump into a lead ceiling. Labeled as aging (and thus inferior) in a world of "Xer hustlers," Boomers are told they "cling" to youth—or should try to. The commerce in aging offers them facsimile products like Viagra and hormone replacement therapy. The midlife is devalued even as Boomers are flattered by being told how much power they have.

If such complex losses can befall people now aged fifty and over—people who are allegedly so omnipotent—the life course can be poisoned for each cohort as it turns fifty, or even forty. If young people help to weaken Social Security at the same time that pension plans are being eliminated or reduced, they will endanger their own future economic safety. Even with high employment, insecurity currently depresses wage gains (as Alan Greenspan has admitted) by weakening isolated employees—and even unions—in labor negotiations. If such deterioration in their expectations cannot be stopped, those who are currently young adults will age without being able to look forward to the wisdom, respect, and higher income supposed to attend the middle years. *Seniority* is the word I use for these economic and social life-course rewards, traditionally granted to white men and now more widely shared by women and minorities. These rewards are the unspoken crux of the American dream. When parents say they want their children to do better, they refer not to their respective entry-level wages, but to the income and level of seniority they might achieve at their wage peak: the midlife high.

To young adults under the spell of the age war, middle age may seem to be a symbol of unjustified power and wealth. But some degree of age inequality makes sense in the long term. A system that brings better treatment for people as they age into the middle years improves conditions for the young, because they will eventually become middle-aged themselves. If there is no rise in wages as today's midlifers age, there will be none for the young when their turn comes. The first salary they earn may be their highest. The stronger the authority of aging-into-the-midlife, the more powerful workers are vis-à-vis their employers. The middle-aged hold their structured advantages—if they have any—only temporarily, in trust for the workforce as a whole. But the seniority "trust" is turning out to be more fragile than anyone my age ever imagined. With the added shove of the age war, seniority may disappear forever.

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Let us look more carefully at the supposedly neutral and scientific concept—that of age cohorts—on which the war depends. The term *Generation X* came into currency during the early '90s to refer to people who were joining the workforce at that very moment. They had to be born, roughly, between 1968 and 1972. This was "right after the Boomers" only if the Boomer age range was artificially inflated. More recently, the Xer category has flexed enough to embrace those born since 1972 as they in turn have joined the workforce. In the age war, a cohort that spans nineteen years is arbitrarily matched against a cohort that spans about fifteen—to prove statistically that Boomers are a giant army (76 or 78 million) and Xers a tiny, defenseless one (between 37 and 45 million). "Couldn't the Baby Boomers pick on a generation its own size?" *Newsweek* asked. Yet if Xers were redefined as those born between 1961 and 1981, the adjustment would make David as big as Goliath.

In other ways, the agglomerations have none of the definitional rigor of useful social-science research cohorts. Until Xers turn fifty, we will lack the data that might make sensible comparison and contrast possible. But data cannot help—according to the sociologist Melissa A. Hardy, editor of an excellent book on aging and social change—with "fuzzy, gradual, or disputed transitions." Most of the differences that the war purports to explain (Xers don't want job security; Boomers just want to have fun!) are disputable, when not absurd. How can age cohorts have essences when people in them age and change? How do people born on the boundary—say, between 1962 and 1967—identify themselves?

No previous cohort has been so dogged by its label as the Boomers, and on so trivial a foundation. (When age cohorts were designated by name, those names used to allude to catastrophes: the Lost Generation after World War I, Depression babies.) But putting these two well-established new characters in the social text, piggybacking on the prestige of demography and history, seems to stabilize cohort construction. Starting at around age fifteen, people are saddled with a cohort name. Each must identify with the label (who can deny his birthdate?) and then is urged to identify with floods of untestable and inflammatory characteristics. Only four years hence, our son's cohort could start being called "the aging Xers." DINKS are being set up as the next Goliaths, fit to bully the younger "Y"s now entrancing the media.

Even used cautiously, the age cohort concept may provide poor insight into the underlying causes of social change. Karl Mannheim, a brilliant theorist of cohorts, attacked those who "'discover' fictitious generation movements to correspond to the crucial turning-points in historical chronology." Such fictions are one-sided, he warned, like "race" or "national character." Mannheim called for multifactorial history, a regard for uneven developments and the power of elites to produce truth.

Each of the two pseudocohorts functions constantly both as a media

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hook and as a tool for marketing by age—the biggest new development in niche marketing. (Youth ads imply that there are no other age groups in America: no babies, no parents, no elderly—just Xers partying together.) That each of the two "cohorts" is irrational and misleading makes the acceptance of the terms all the more striking. Adding one new age group to the language is no mean feat. Validating two incoherent cohort terms in such a short period demonstrates how effective media teaching can be when it is motivated, persistent, and well funded. Age has become naturalized as a primary explanation of life-chance differences and as a justifier of contemporary feelings, personnel practices, legal decisions, economic conditions, and understandings of the future.

This "generation gap" is not universal, as writers innocent of history like to suppose. Generation gaps, too, are constructed, rhetorically shaped for their moment. Audre Lorde warned that they can be a tool of a repressive society, facilitating historical amnesia. Middle-ageism now functions, for example, to make parents' work experience seem irrelevant and their impotent pain seem like useless nostalgia. Not since the carnage of World War I, and Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (which imagined a world in which sons had to kill fathers literally), has a constructed war against the midlife taken forms so extreme.

Getting the young to voice intense negative feelings toward another age group obliterates differences within a cohort—gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical ability. It may also override intergenerational solidarity in an activist group whose members have been brought together by a shared political goal. The worst of it may be that it undermines commonalities between parents and their children. It pits us against each other as if we were unrelated social groups: silenced audience vs. dominators of discourse, small cohort against huge one, poor youths vs. rich adults. For the young, the war cruelly depends on the poignant mix of the youthful desire to be independent and the increasing need for help against market forces; for their parents, it cruelly takes advantage of both their devotion to their children and their anxiety that they may actually be declining. Cohort-naming breaks the sense of life-course continuity that underlies any hope of generational unity. Although young people can become midlife adults, Xers can never become Boomers. They can only become aging Xers in their turn.

How can we resist this contrived war? To begin with, I believe that in America today, age is the new kind of difference that makes a difference. Only when the study of age is practiced as widely as the study of gender and race can we fully gauge the long-term negative consequences of using age as a wedge issue and allowing age to provide linguistic categories that are so peremptory.

We can also refuse to identify ourselves primarily as members of age

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cohorts. Each of us gets to choose, after all, which of our multiple identities comes first. In writing about politics and culture, as in talking within our families, we can eschew the terms *Xer* and *Boomer,* justify their use, place them within quotation marks, or, as here, subject them to scrutiny and use them ironically.

When parents and their adult children are in the workforce together, they can stress their relational identity as people, united by love and by their shared concern about the future. The war is tending to divide the family at a point in history when many parents—disowning traditional patterns of age hierarchy—have long embraced the ideal I call "becoming equally adults together." Because many of us raised our children in more egalitarian ways than our parents did, we feel we deserve a different covenant. The individuation of young adults can coincide with their entry into the workforce and still be a goal that is compatible with friendship and reciprocity with their parents' generation. And whether or not they have children, midlifers can fight alongside the young once everyone understands what is at stake.

We can find shared values. In my own three-generation family, we agree that the economy isn't producing enough good jobs with room for advancement—for the young or for those in midlife. We agree that young people cannot be saved from the firestorm of the millennium separately from those in their middle years. We agree about needed legislation: livable wages, a shorter work week and paid overtime, temporary jobs with benefits, paid parental leave, better day care, reliable pension plans, secure Social Security.

We can hold CEOs in business and higher education responsible for reversing the trends toward using consultants and adjuncts, midlife downsizing, and 24/7. The current administration wants to provide health insurance for those over fifty-five; the young need it too. This means national health care. The goal is to save the structures and values on which all must rely: the age-wage curve, workforce solidarity, life-course continuity. I consider this a true family-values agenda.

We can start building a strong multigenerational front at the dinner table, and help its shared vision spread to high school and college classrooms. We can learn to resist the assumptions about age that journalists constantly toss at us. If necessary, we can add activism to age consciousness and step into the street together, arm in arm. The first step toward mutual rescue is to unmask the war between the Boomers and the Xers in all its mendacity and malevolence.

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Americanophilia

GEORGE WATSON

To be an Americanophile is to love America—its literature, its music, its films—without belonging to it. Americans are largely unaware of Americanophilia as a European state of mind. In fact, they seem reluctant even to contemplate it; and its climax, in the twenty years or so after the Second World War, came and went unregarded in the United States. Perhaps it is not too late, however, to mark it down, or too soon to sum it up. By now the world has changed. Cultures are no longer clearly national; a global economy has internationalized the arts; the young scarcely think in national terms at all; and the phenomenon has inevitably faded, much like Anglophilia and Francophilia. But if the past is a foreign country, as somebody once remarked, it may be none the less interesting for that.

Odd, though, that Americanophilia should have been once so powerful and yet, in its day, so unnoticed in the United States. I suspect Americans did not notice it because, for reasons well worth unraveling, they could not believe it was true and, in some profoundly secretive way, did not want it to be true. So when Europeans proclaimed their admiration, they were simply unheeded. The reasons for all that are bound to be fascinating, but they will have to wait.

The story, though essentially a twentieth-century one, has its prehistory. The thirty-year-old Ralph Waldo Emerson so charmed Thomas Carlyle, on a visit to Scotland in September 1833, that the Scottish man of letters thought his New World innocence little short of supernatural.

George Watson, Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, is the author of *The Literary Critics, Politics and Literature in Modern Britain; British Literature Since 1945*; and *The Lost Literature of Socialism*. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota, New York University, and the University of Georgia.

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Emerson seemed like an angel. "What I loved in the man," Carlyle wrote in a letter to John Stuart Mill, who had sent him on, was "his health, his unity with himself," so that everybody and everything found a "peacable adjustment," always spontaneous and humble. That strikes the right note of enchantment. But most of the infatuation in the last century was inevitably through books. Clement Shorter, a London critic born in 1857, tells in his 1927 autobiography how for him and other English boys in the 1860s and 1870s "American books played a far larger part" than British books—especially the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Bret Harte, and Mark Twain, if only because, before the days of international copyright, they were cheap. "Every novel-reading boy of my generation owes much to America." It is easy to forget, in an academic age that all too often measures literary tastes by curricular requirements, that fiction was written to be read rather than studied, and that you do not need courses in American literature to know it or to value it.

London, as the main publishing center of the English-speaking world, sometimes preempted American masterpieces to ensure copyright. Twain's two great novels, *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, were initially published there—the first, six months before it appeared in the United States, the second, a few days before—and they were more highly esteemed in Britain than at home. So was their author. Oxford conferred an honorary doctorate on Twain in 1907, three years before his death; it was an honor grander than any he ever received in his native land. The following year Ezra Pound settled in London, where he remained (more or less) until 1920, creating as a young American of fresh, iconoclastic views an admiring coterie and inspiring W. B. Yeats, in his middle years, to remake his poetic diction. Shortly after, in 1912, Robert Frost settled in England for three years, seeking and gaining recognition as a poet and publishing his first two volumes of verse there. In 1915 D. H. Lawrence began writing *Studies in Classic American Literature*, which he finished in New Mexico. In his last chapter he hailed Walt Whitman as "the first white aboriginal" of America who offered "the heroic message of the American future." America was a liberator, for Lawrence, and John Addington Symonds had daringly anticipated him in that view. In 1893, a year after Whitman's death, Symonds published an entire book in his praise, and here the emphasis is openly sexual, since Symonds admired *Leaves of Grass* for its candid avowal of "manly attachment" and "athletic love." That was two years before the trial of Oscar Wilde. Through Whitman, Symonds concluded, he had been enabled to fraternize with "men of all classes and several races," including manual workers and sons of the soil. So the liberating spirit of America was seen in Europe in more aspects than one.

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, as I vividly recall, American writers were the rage of literary London, and it could be a

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proud boast for an Englishman in the late 1940s to have visited the United States, and an embarrassment not to have done so. In a dollar-hungry age, America was not easily attainable, and its charms in those days were the charms of forbidden fruit. Its creative talents were moving back to England, in any case, for the first time since the Depression had driven some of them home. In 1952 Raymond Chandler arrived in London, delighted to be received as an eminent novelist rather than as a pulp-fiction hack, and he returned in 1955 for an extended visit and far more hero worship than he could ever hope to find at home. "In England I am an author," he had written in 1952; "in the USA just a mystery writer." It was an expatriate Englishman, W. H. Auden, who had already announced in "The Guilty Vicarage" that Chandler's novels should be judged "not as escape literature but as works of art." The mood was reverent. "I think only Americans can write nowadays," I remember an English literary lady remarking at the time, in superior tones. She meant Ernest Hemingway, Saul Bellow, and William Faulkner, who had not yet won his Nobel Prize, along with living exemplars of the great poetic tradition like William Carlos Williams, John Crowe Ransom, and Wallace Stevens. The judgment seemed perfectly natural by then. An American called T. S. Eliot had been the acknowledged leader of English letters for a generation, and the new British novel and the new British theater were yet to be born.

By the early 1950s the American conquest was complete. In 1951 Edith Sitwell edited *The American Genius,* a poetic anthology stretching from Edward Taylor, in the seventeenth century, down to living poets like Theodore Roethke, with an appendix of prose and a disjointed but essentially enthusiastic preface. Drama came too, and in more recent times it has been easier to see the plays of Arthur Miller or David Mamet in London than in New York. And the vogue goes far beyond literature. To the wonderment and shame of some of their American friends, British film buffs vastly admire Westerns; in fact Europe might be loosely defined as the place where intellectuals admit to liking them. "There is no such thing as a bad Western," the critic A. Alvarez once announced in a BBC broadcast. Americanophilia reached academe, too. Professors who visited the United States for a term or a year could return enthusing over the American academic system; the graduate seminar, hitherto almost unknown in British universities in arts subjects, sprang up in open imitation of American practice. "We don't realize how provincial we are," J. H. Plumb remarked after a time in a history department in New York. With *The Liberal Imagination,* published in 1950, Lionel Trilling became the most influential cultural critic of his age, without exception, and no less in Britain than at home; in the mid-1960s he was offered an Oxford chair, and seven years after his death, in 1982, the university press there collected his writings in twelve handsome volumes.

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And so on, and on. The American song tradition from Jerome Kern through George Gershwin to Cole Porter was a cult in England long before the war, and Winston Churchill was among its adherents. American idioms came and went, too, as fashions; in 1958 Kingsley Amis, already an established novelist, went to Princeton for a year and started writing dialogue full of transatlantic phrases like "let it ride," usually placed in the mouths of bright adolescents, and adopted into his social life one or two regrettable habits like lighting cigarettes at dinner between courses. To be an Americanophile, in those years, was to be in, and if you had been to the United States you liked it to show and you let it hang out.

All this, however, seems to have struck no chord in the American psyche, then or since, and European Americanophilia came and went uncredited and unremarked. Americans still seem to have little sense of the sheer international prestige of what they have achieved in the arts, and a British accent can be particularly unfortunate in speaking of such things, since it can easily sound patronizing. In 1869 James Russell Lowell wrote a resentful article for the *Atlantic Monthly* called "On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners," complaining about the sense of superiority he encountered abroad. It is a sentiment to be nervously remembered, though young Americans nowadays seem little troubled by it. But some delicacy is called for here, and it may have been precisely that sense of embarrassment that has kept the question for so long taboo.

The vast exception to all this was (and is) jazz, along with the rock music that succeeded it in the 1950s. That tradition was always seen as American, and it was widely admired all around the world; but then not all Americans, who can be stuffy about such things, accept its artistic merits. When an editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* mentioned Fats Waller to Diana Trilling, it is said, she was not merely incredulous that he should admire the pianist and jazz musician, but astounded that he should even have heard of him. Which is typical. The failure to see what America has accomplished amounts to a resolute refusal to listen and look. I recall being amazed, on my first visit to the United States in 1957, to hear the phrase "the great American novel" consistently applied to the future, as if nothing of the kind had yet happened. Anyone who mentioned *Moby-Dick* or *The Great Gatsby* or *Light in August* was greeted with a blank stare. Perhaps, as a British visitor, I was not supposed to have heard of such books.

The high tide of American cultural prestige in Europe coincided, paradoxically, with a low point in American cultural confidence. In matters other than cultural, the mood in the United States was buoyant. By the 1950s there were no doubts whatever about American military power, though perhaps there should have been. No doubts, either, about

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America's technical preeminence, and I recall a crucial moment late in 1957 when Sputnik went into orbit: the sense of amazement and horror at the discovery that any other nation should be technically ahead of the United States, and the anxious and bitter education debate it provoked. It counted for nothing that the Soviet Union was larger and more populous; it was axiomatic in those days that America, however culturally backward, was first (and easily first) in all things technical. I even recall a moment of social embarrassment at a European lunch party when an American visitor, on seeing instant coffee, rashly and (as she thought) harmlessly remarked, "Oh look, you even have American coffee." She was briskly informed by a Swiss lady that Nescafé had been invented on the Lake of Geneva in the 1930s. But then it was difficult to persuade Americans in the early 1950s, when television had just begun in the United States, that the British had had TV before the war; harder still to persuade them that Britain was first to develop nuclear power for commercial purposes. If anything was new and technical, so the feeling ran, it must be American.

Contrast all that military and technical confidence with the crushing sense of cultural inferiority that prevailed in the United States two generations ago. Because it was widely assumed that foreigners knew nothing and cared nothing about American civilization, cultural centers funded by the federal government were set up in foreign capitals, and eminent authors like Thornton Wilder and Allen Tate were bundled around the globe at the taxpayers' expense, in a cultural offensive only briefly embarrassed by McCarthyism, to assure the world that America too had its poets, playwrights, novelists, and critics. In other words, Americans did not know, or would not accept, that the world knew it already. Academic courses abroad on American literature were subsidized, and libraries were funded, on the assumption that unless something is formally studied it does not qualify as a serious interest. A Radcliffe girl looked at me in utter amazement when I told her that Paddy Chayefsky's *Marty* had been a cult movie in Oxford when it first appeared in 1955, and its New York backstreet idioms ("You want I should hit you one?") the vogue of student conversation there. Van Cliburn's triumph as a pianist in Moscow in April 1958, when he won the Tchaikovsky competition, earned him a ticker-tape parade on his return to New York—the other side of the Sputnik coin. If it was astonishing that Russians should be technically ahead, it was equally astonishing that they should be artistically behind.

The popularity of Hollywood, among the so-called cinema generation of the 1930s and 1940s, or those reared after the invention of the talkies and before TV, would be hard to overstate. One anecdote will do. Philip Larkin first met Kingsley Amis, his lifelong friend, in an impromptu mock rehearsal of a gangster movie. In Larkin's 1964 preface to his novel *Jill*, he tells how in 1941 a friend pointed a finger at a young man standing in

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a college doorway in Oxford and uttered a short bark, like a shot on a worn sound track in a Saturday cinema. Amis took his cue:

> Clutching his chest in a rictus of agony, he threw one arm up against the archway and began slowly crumpling downwards, fingers scoring the stonework. Just as he was about to collapse on the piled-up laundry, however, . . . he righted himself and trotted over to us.

So their friendship began in a mimicry of the world of Al Capone. But then everyone echoed Hollywood in those days. In *Rebecca's Vest* Karl Miller tells how his Scottish mother would imitate James Cagney in her kitchen.

To say that Europeans admire Hollywood may sound banal and pointless, especially since such admiration, it is often felt, is spiced with mockery or at best condescension. But that is a misunderstanding. Americans find Hollywood funny too; and I would hotly deny that my own admiration for the Marx brothers is or ever was condescending, and find it difficult to understand what such a charge might mean. I take the Marx brothers as they are meant to be taken. The same goes for Laurel and Hardy, who plainly count as an American cultural phenomenon, even if Stan Laurel was an Englishman. In *America in the Movies*, Michael Wood tells how, as an English boy in the 1950s, he greedily drank up the Hollywood world of the stylishly overdone, as he calls it—a world as coherent as Balzac's—in films that "dreamed up an America all their own, and persuaded me to share the dream." Hollywood may have been absurd, among other things, but it was an absurdity that compelled audiences abroad no less than at home; and it persuaded them of an American reality, one might add, as well as of a dream. It is important to understand national stereotypes, after all, whether they are absurd or not; and a classic like *Casablanca*—with its cynical but warmhearted American played by Humphrey Bogart, its witty, womanizing French police chief who turns out all right in the end, its brutal Germans, and its silly, affected British, including (as always) a woman in a ridiculous hat—defines a range of national stereotypes that Americans seriously believed in when I first lived there a few years later. It was a fiction, but, like a lot of fictions, it was informative in a useful, even indispensable way. Like many millions around the world, I first learned my America in the movies, and the only serious misinformation I can report is that I was surprised to discover when I first went there that Americans do not live most of their lives in night clubs. In fact, most people I met had never been to one.

Americanophilia was ultimately incredible to the American mind, however, and it was so, I suspect, because it was unimaginable. I speak here of the mind of an intelligentsia, to be sure: of that small proportion of its people, as Henry James would say, that is in any way capable of

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giving a critical account of itself. The sample is no doubt unrepresentative, but it is all there is, as quotable evidence, and it is a sample that, as elsewhere, is likely to be influential far in excess of its size. There is a generalization to be ventured here—that no nation in history has been so systematically and consistently abused by its own intelligentsia as the United States in the twentieth century. An American intellectual defines himself by such abuse, and the record is by now endless and, stylistically speaking, distinguished. H. L. Mencken said there was no underestimating the intelligence of the American public, and called its democracy the art of running a circus from the monkey cage. That sets a high standard, but Gore Vidal, needless to say, has tried to go one better, which is what he is for, and has called American civilization something the absence of which drove Henry James to Europe. No doubt Dorothy Parker said it too, and the critical reader is left with little to do and little to say. When Oscar Wilde, after a lecture tour in 1882, called American life one long expectoration, or when Bernard Shaw said that in the United States an asylum for the sane would be empty, they were competing in an open race nobody can win, since it started early and goes on and on. There is no insult a foreigner can level against American civilization that has not already been outdone by an American.

No doubt all this noisy self-contempt masks a secret elation; no doubt the abuser is drawing attention to the barbarism and stupidity of others, never to his own. To be an intellectual in America is to be different, or so the implicit claim goes. And the answer to the mystery surely lies here. Americans find it incredible that Europeans should admire American civilization because the sheer weight of anti-American propaganda from inside America itself makes it impossible for them to believe that anyone could. The American intelligentsia may or may not be sincere in its abuse—it continues to live, on the whole, and by choice, in the United States—and it may or may not be right. But its abuse is heeded, quoted, and, more often that not, believed. Repetition makes it look true.

Cultural anti-patriotism goes back a long way. Sidney Lanier is said to have punctured Walt Whitman's patriotic claims in *Leaves of Grass* with the damning parody "Because the Mississippi River is long, every American is wise." Departments of literature in the United States before the 1930s scarcely thought American books worth teaching at all, and T. S. Eliot once revealed in *Poetry Chicago* that in his own student days at Harvard, before the First World War, the American literary scene looked "a total blank," Harvard men reading only English poets of the 1890s. The homeward shift of interest was uncertain and slow. F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, much of it about Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau, appeared just before Pearl Harbor, and must have been largely written in the 1930s, being a big book. But it is not a nationalistic book; it allows Coleridge at the outset to limit the terms of the critical debate; and

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anyone who calls Melville's *Pierre* an American *Hamlet*, as Matthiessen does, is plainly making a point for national humility. Its chief polemical claim was that as late as the nineteenth century the American literary tradition had still not shed the allegorical obsessions of early Puritanism. Hardly a recommendation, coming from an Episcopalian of pro-Soviet sympathies, and the book leaves you with the sense of a literature whose unhappy distinction was to be backward, unadventurous, and provincial. After Matthiessen's suicide in 1950 his disciples tried to make something fitfully patriotic out of all this, since by then the United States had miraculously emerged, with some suddenness, as a world power. But the claim was unconvincing. If classic American literature exists principally as a revelation of national character, one is left feeling that it cannot have been much of a literature; and true to form, the disciples did not remain patriots for long. "My country, always wrong" was their natural state of mind, and in the 1960s many seized the opportunities offered by the Vietnam War to revert to type.

In a word, the American intelligentsia cannot hear what Americanophiles have to say, or if they hear it they cannot believe it. Where but in America does imported mean good and domestic inferior? Al Pacino's film *Looking for Richard* sums up that resolute sense of cultural inferiority with compelling precision. American actors cannot speak Shakespeare, so the film insists, and they cannot because they are Americans. The paradox here is that Pacino, in the brief excerpts from *Richard III* that are shown, speaks well and makes an excellent king. No use trying to convince him, though. He would rather sound like Sir John Gielgud.

It might be instructive to contemplate how great civilizations regard the fascination of their neighbors, or its absence. Spain seems content with a modest intellectual role, for all that Spanish is the second language of the Western world. The French, by contrast, concerned with their place in the sun, demand and sometimes achieve a certain eminence for their language; but Francophilia has been in decline for a century and more, and its decline may be terminal. Germans, embarrassed by two world wars, have shrunk back from a world role except in commerce, and seek no place for German in international culture; while the British take the relaxed and unexcited view that if the world wants to use their language, that is a matter for the world. To Americans is reserved a stranger fate. For most of the century they have unwittingly enjoyed the cultural admiration of the world and have refused even to acknowledge it. Busy, as ever, with their ancient practice of intellectual self-contempt, they have simply not noticed that it is there.

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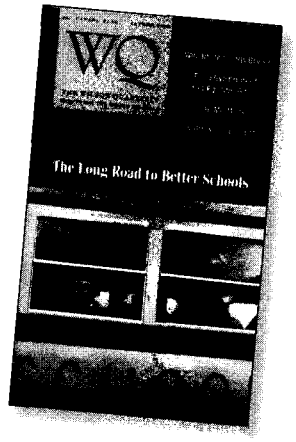

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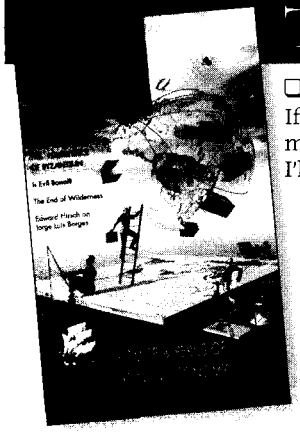

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

The Misty Crystal Ball

SHERWIN B. NULAND

While watching that huge ball drop at midnight on New Year's Eve, I realized that I, too, had dropped the ball. For months, I had been pontificating to anyone who sought medical predictions for the coming century, sparing few of my inquirers the verbal vanity of an opinionated man who spends too much time alone, scribbling in a small room. And yet, in a regular column dedicated to the uncertainty of the art of healing, I had written not a word about the next hundred years. What, in fact, could be more uncertain than the future of medicine?

I suppose there may have been someone who, in 1800, foresaw the germ theory and the transformation it would wreak on medical thought; or the notion that the origin of disease should be sought in cells rather than in the affected organs themselves; or perhaps the revolution in surgery that would make possible the removal of entire lengths of the digestive tract without destroying the quality of life.

And I suppose also that there may have been someone who, in 1900, foresaw the invention of machines that would allow the inside of a stilled heart to be surgically invaded and its valves repaired; or the commonplace transplantation of organs; or, *mirabile dictu,* the era of molecular biology that is causing medical thought to be transformed once again, even more than it was transformed by germ theory in the nineteenth century.

But if such Nostradamuses did exist, there is no written evidence. Viewed retrospectively, what might appear to be leaps achievable only with the scientific equivalent of seven-league boots can be recognized in each case to have been the result of a long series of small achievements, many of which are now forgotten by all but a few specialized historians of medicine. Those who did the prevenient work rarely had any idea what their studies and experiments were leading to; the research was done for its own sake and not, until the transforming discoveries came into view, as part of some long-range plan that might have been predicted by knowledgeable seers at the beginning of a century.

Now, as before, there are researchers who, in the words of Longfellow, are slowly "toiling upward in the night," having no idea how their increments of work will shift the currents of biomedical science. Or perhaps some of them do have an idea, but it is wrong. What is thought to lead down a specific avenue often takes another direction, and successive discoverers find themselves on a hitherto unforeseeable journey. It was only in the century just passed that the growth of science began to be subjected to the scrutiny of philosophers and historians, and they have taught the rest of us about the undirected ways in which knowledge really does evolve.

The result is that there is nowadays a much greater appreciation of the complexities of scientific discovery than there was one or two hundred years ago, and this should help us recognize the hazards of attempting to foretell progress beyond the next decade or so. But some of us stubbornly refuse to learn from the lessons of the past two centuries; we are not fazed by the unfulfilled forecasts of our predecessors. We would-be prophets cannot resist plunging into the predictive waters, though with varying degrees of recklessness. Being more aquatically (and oracularly) timid than most, I'll restrict myself here to sticking a toe in—or perhaps I'll wade out just a bit, but not far enough to get in over my head. After all, putting prophecies into print is quite different from simply mouthing off about them.

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In the spirit of toe-sticking, I'll start with one of the innovations that is already beginning to come into view, by which I mean that it will be affecting at least some patients by the end of this decade. It doesn't seem risky to foresee the almost-visible dawn of the day when pharmacologic agents will be tailored to the genetic characteristics of specific diseases and even specific patients. As the genetic contribution to more and more pathologies is identified, it will become possible to engineer drugs for individuals that correct or head off abnormalities. Gene therapy is still far from living up to the assertion made in 1996 by the founder of the field, W. French Anderson: "Twenty years from now, gene therapy will have revolutionized the practice of medicine. Virtually every disease will have gene therapy as one of its treatments." But the hour is still early. Though there is no general agreement that the boldness of Anderson's statement is justified, at least this aspect of it appears to be coming close to realization. And the rest of its implications cannot be ignored either. In spite of failures and at least one tragedy, no sensible biomedical scientist is giving up on the scenario that Anderson continues to believe is realistic, though many question his notion of the time required to achieve it. Even the much-heralded replacement (or perhaps repair) of disease-related genes may not be as far off as some pessimists think, notwithstanding its present chaotic state of development.

Another innovation that can be anticipated—one even closer in many ways than genetically based drugs—is the imminent revolution in diagnostic imaging. The various types of scanning now available, and most particularly the rapidly improving technology of what is called functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), which allows the study of chemical reactions, will soon provide opportunities for investigating disease processes in ways that will make current X-ray techniques and other radiologic methods seem absurdly simplistic. It is not too farfetched to look forward to the day (which will probably come before mid-century) when biopsies, blood tests and other tissue and fluid samples, exploratory surgery, electrocardiograms, and similar studies of function and structure will be obsolete. Technicians will place patients in scanning chambers in which all manner of pictures will be produced to elucidate bodily mechanisms, right down to the level of intracellular activities. The pinpointing of many of the factors that contribute to the complexities of disease will be enormously enhanced—at, of course, an unavoidably enormous expense.

Not only clinical medicine, but basic research, too, will benefit from the new technology, because imaging will contribute to the other modalities that explain the molecular origins of disease. More understanding will bring less need for the draconian measures that currently constitute our surgical corrections of pathology. As biochemical and genetic therapies replace surgery, the therapeutic approach to many diseases will undergo vast changes. Surgical treatment of cancer will be the first to diminish and then disappear, followed in succeeding decades by the operative treatment of cardiovascular, congenital, and inflammatory diseases. By the end of the century, the operating room will be essentially a place to treat trauma and insert newly crafted parts. John Hunter, the eighteenth-century Scotsman who introduced his fellow surgeons to the methods of science, once remarked that operations are a barbarian's method of achieving ends that wiser men would reach by strategy. During the course of the twenty-first century, we will become biomedically much wiser than we are today.

But until that wisdom has fully evolved, it will be necessary to bring the ancient craft of surgery closer to the present technological era, and that will take place within the next two decades. Here, too, imaging will play an important role. The combination of increasingly sophisticated CT scanning and MRI will show us an accurate three-dimensional representation of diseased anatomical structures. After a patient has been anesthetized, slender externally wired instruments will be inserted into the body through tiny incisions: laser-based tissue vaporizers to replace present-day scalpels and scissors, welding devices to replace stitches and staples. The surgeon will sit at a console before two screens, one showing the area to be operated upon and the other a simulation of the proposed operation. Using a sort of navigation system, he will superimpose the operation on the anatomy and then pro-

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gram the entire procedure to be carried out by the instruments. Not only will the system be voice-operated, but the surgeon may even have several consoles in front of him, so that as many as six operations can be done at once. Because the probes will be inserted and connected to their electronic directing source by technicians, the surgeon will be able to do all his work from a remote location—even from the other side of the world. Aftercare beyond the first few days will be overseen via a monitoring device placed in the patient's home, so that no postoperative visits will be needed. Operations for trauma may even be performed at the scene of injury, which will greatly decrease the accident and battlefield mortality rate. Soldiers will carry small monitors into combat, enabling them to be located immediately upon being wounded so that corpsmen may do the initial first aid and insert probes.

Research with stem cells, those primordial units of life with the potential to develop into any of the body's constituent tissues, will change the face of medical therapy, especially that which deals with congenital defects and with the effects of such degenerative diseases as arteriosclerosis and arthritis. Transplantation may very well become obsolete by midcentury, as the bioengineers partner themselves with the stem-cell pioneers to create new organs crafted by combining designer cells with mechanical devices. The new field called biomimetics has already given us artificial joints, heart valves, intraocular lenses, and the like, but these kinds of structures are only the first of many possibilities likely to spring from the union of the two disciplines.

We constantly hear about the "Century of the Brain," but that era has long since begun and will long continue, overlapping any temporal borders. Studies of the nature of consciousness and of the relationships between brain and mind and between mind and body will bring insights that have been sought since ancient times. Developments in these areas will reveal the mechanisms by which nonscientific approaches to healing, such as those we call traditional medicine, can be effective under appropriate circumstances. The real mechanism by which factors like faith, psychological profile, suggestion, and placebos sometimes influence outcome will be critically scrutinized. The vast amount of chaff will be separated from the priceless wheat, and orthodox medicine will incorporate the results into the armamentarium of scientifically based healing.

The laboratory theorists will continue to raise the specter of increasing the human life span to unjustifiable, if not frankly dangerous, lengths. But common sense will prevail, and the research in aging that is of real value will be devoted to the improvement of the added years of life we have already been given and the few more that the other advances will provide. Attention will be focused on the notion of what has been called "compression of morbidity," by which is meant the conversion of the present slow decline in the health of the aged to a pattern in which vitality is maintained until shortly before death.

Of those advances that can be predicted, the most flabbergasting will be the creation of life in the laboratory. Whatever may be the real nature of life as defined by theologians, philosophers, and poets, its strictly physiological characteristics can be found in any textbook of elementary biology. To qualify, organic material must grow, respond to stimuli, digest, reproduce, and fulfill several other functions. This requires at least the minimal set of genes that permit these functions to be carried out. Scientists are still a long way from identifying what this so-called minimal genome might consist of, but they are hard at work trying to find out. Because it is already possible to build small segments of DNA, it makes sense that such a genome might be synthesized once its constituent structures are known. A project like this takes the insights of many thousands of researchers and can proceed only by small increments over a long time. But there seems little question that such a thing will come about by the year 2100. It is not impossible that an entire organism, even a multicellular one, may be created in the laboratory by then. The implications for medicine of such an achievement are huge, but the first of them will be the opportunity to study the ways in which life processes go awry to cause disease. And there will be also be therapeutic possibilities, such as the use of synthesized organisms in the fight against pathogens and genetic abnormalities.

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All of these predictions are well within the bounds of reason. The probabilities of their fulfillment are so high, in fact, that no Wizard of Odds would dare bet against them. What cannot, of course, be known is the nature of that unforeseeable series of events that will once again transform medical thinking. Although the fact that each of the last five centuries has witnessed a transforming upheaval in medicine does not necessarily imply that it will happen again, I will (at the risk of leading you astray, trusting reader) hereby express my confidence that it will. I do recognize the hazards of listening to people like me, whose baleful effect on others was pointed out more than three hundred years ago by Blaise Pascal in his *Pensées:* "All the misfortunes of men arise from one single thing, which is their inability to sit still in a small room at home." But even so, I stick by my forecast that something enormous will take place that is at present unpredictable. Should the future prove me to have been only a troublemaking false prophet, my critics will by then have to organize a séance in order to tell me so.

The foregoing are medical or scientific predictions. But there will be yet another innovation that fits into neither of those categories, and it will result in consequences as profound as any of those already enumerated. I refer to the change that will appear in society's attitude toward its own involvement in biomedicine. First, priorities in the application of new discoveries and, then, priorities in research will within a few decades be determined by a consensus of the public and scientific communities. This will come about as a result of society's increasing realization that the moral and ethical implications of the new biomedicine demand the attention of all of us. Though scientists currently resist this sort of societal input, they will come to an appreciation of its importance as they make decisions that reflect their obligation to vouchsafe the future of our species and its environment. This new partnership will refuse to let the present unsatisfactory state of science education in this country persist. And this brings me to my final prediction: If for no other reason than the sheer necessity of increased involvement, we will see vast changes in the educational system, with great improvements in the average American's knowledge of science.

Each of the past four centuries has seen an exponential increase in the number of people doing science and an exponential increase in the complexity of the enterprise. The breathtaking achievements of the researchers have been made at the cost of great individual dedication and sacrifice, and in more than a few instances at the cost of researchers' lives, whether directly or indirectly. Basic scientists are men and women apart, and the rest of us who benefit from their contributions do so without very often stopping to think of the price that many of them have paid and continue to pay in terms of personal well-being. We take for granted that every generation will produce young people so fascinated by the study of nature that they will forgo more readily attainable pleasures in order to pursue this particular form of truth. We have even become glib—as have I in this essay—about our expectations of what they should provide for us.

There is a greatness about many of these people, and a patience and persistence that dwarfs the endurance of all but a few dedicated strivers in other fields. They are the ones about whom Longfellow might have been thinking when he wrote the line quoted in the first part of this essay. Here is the entire passage in which his words appear, from *The Ladder of Saint Augustine:*

> The heights by great men reached and kept
> Were not attained by sudden flight,
> But they, while their companions slept,
> Were toiling upward in the night.

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JOURNAL

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MARY
GORDON

January 12. My love for my children is overwhelming. Sometimes I simply have to sit down until the wave of it crashes over me. When they were small and I was overwhelmed like this, I could take them onto my lap and hold them. I could hold them and hold them until I could go on again. Now they are adults; they are both taller than I am, and I can probably never hold David again, not without reservation: he is a man. The odd experience of having a beautiful and charming son, the kind of boy who wouldn't have gone out with me in high school.

January 19. Sometimes I am tormented by wanting to read several things simultaneously—Rilke, Welty, Pasolini—and my itchiness to read them all at once makes it impossible to read any. I sit here in a state of stupid agitation that turns quickly to fatigue. I know what I need to do: listen to music, look at an art book. I need Schumann and Caspar David Friedrich. But I am afraid to do it, afraid of that piercing that real beauty achieves. I don't want my skin pierced. I think of Simone Weil, reading, reading through headaches. But I can't do it. I need to sleep.

I wake after ten minutes' sleep, feeling I can do anything. Perhaps what I needed was not to sleep but to dream. I know that I dreamt, and that it was a very brief, very pleasurable dream, but I have no memory of it.

January 23. Weather can be frightening even in a city created to protect us from weather. The sound of wind. A cold rain early in the morning, each drop a separate attack, the drops hard as stones and the winds disheveling the trees, usually so composed and elegant, like coiffed ladies whose hair and scarves have been disarrayed by the winds, whose stockings have been splashed by mud, whose shoes have been destroyed. Litter baskets on Riverside Drive roll into the street; cars honk at them, then the drivers, realizing how foolish this is, swerve away from them, look around to see if there is anyone on the street they need to be abashed before.

* * *

From Conrad: "A blank wall—perfectly blank. A blankness to run at and dash your head against." I teach *The Secret Agent.* The students respond intensely; they love it, but it disturbs them. Afterwards, one of them comes up and says, "As bad as the ending is, it could be worse, if Winnie had to tell her mother about Stevie's death and then go on living with her." I want to embrace the student not only because she has said something fine, but because we share an understanding: the worst thing is always the long haul.

January 29. How often in here I write about feeling frustrated, even ashamed of myself that I've spent too much time with people, too little time reading and writing. But today I am reminded of my great good fortune in my friends. They make me feel less alone in the problem of my mother, who has a bruise on her face that the nursing home has been unwilling to investigate, unwilling to explain. I am enraged because my mother, who cannot

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Mary Gordon, Professor of English at Barnard College, has been keeping a journal since she was in high school. Her latest books are *Seeing Through Places: Reflections on Geography and Identity* (Scribner) and *Joan of Arc* (Penguin Lives series).

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speak and cannot move, is the most vulnerable possible human being: much more vulnerable than a child. Penny says she will visit my mother with me, if I need it. David simply lets me weep, makes a place where I can weep with utter freedom. Maureen and Rita, doctors, speak to the medical staff. Penny finds out about the state's regulations. Helen sends me a beautiful postcard, saying she is with me and that my book has given her pleasure. Gary talks about the mysteriousness of it all. Then he makes me laugh. Impossible to honor the importance of humor, of laughter. I am actually not interested in reading about it, and not drawn to it in literature. When I was a child and had to deal with this kind of horror, I was entirely alone. The miracle of my adult life: I am no longer alone.

* * *

Chekhov: "When someone expends the least amount of motion on a given action, that's grace."

February 1. Marvin, back from California, tells me about a house shaped like an umbrella. One of the children of the house has a room like a tree house; another has a room with a view of all of San Francisco. What would it be like to be a child of such a house?

I imagine that it was built by a mother who was given, suddenly and for no reason she could trace, a very great deal of money and decided to build for her children a house that was a game.

February 4. Reading *Jude the Obscure.* The image of Arabella keeping the egg between her breasts. What if it began to hatch? What of the beak?

February 9. As a fiction writer, or a person who thinks as one, I am very tolerant of various ways of living. As a person alive in this world, I can bear hardly any.

February 13. My father has been dead forty-three years today. I am the only one alive who mourns him. And I do mourn him. This is my truest fidelity. My sadness for both my parents. And the privacy of this sadness, for we are the only ones who know each other this way, as parents and children. As members of this little family. The exclusivity of the only child. Only we were there for that life. And now she is gone too, though the animal still lives.

In the midst of my sadness, an operatic tenor lifts his voice on the street. Sings, simply sings. Usually when this happens it's a woman's voice. When I hear it, I always wonder: is this irrepressible joy or just showing off? Do they want to be heard, or do they just *need* to sing, is the need to sing an irresistible pressure the way the need to write is sometimes, a need having nothing to do with a reader? This is the kind of writing I most like, or these are the times I most like myself as a writer: when I have the urge to write, as if there were a weight inside me I had to disgorge, or as if the need to express myself were a load I needed to put down.

I often regret that I have not lived my life as the one single thing: the mourner of my father. Knowing myself this way, I would have had no doubts about the value of my life.

February 17. The odd things I liked to chew, or have in my mouth when I was a child. Waxed paper with Crisco. Broken balloons. The textures of the balloons that I would chew reminded me of the texture of the thighs of the demons expelled from Paradise. I thought of their chewing on each other's rubbery thighs. Or perhaps it was myself, the chewer, I imagined.

February 18. I read an article by a translator who speaks of his contempt for all the English translations of Akhmatova, those that offer unrhymed versions. Yet these have meant a very great deal to me. Must I accept the judgment "But you are wrong, they shouldn't have meant a great deal to you"? How ready we are to accept Frost's "Poetry is what's lost in translation." But the power of images, which are visual, tactile, kinesthetic, can be rendered in translated words, as long as the words aren't ugly. We don't want to believe this, we for whom the oral aspects of language are so dear, but it may be true. I would not like to have lived without the poetry of Akhmatova and Rilke, which I have read only in translation. My life would have been less rich.

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February 20. On the subway, a very heavy black woman is reading a book: *Goals for Self-Improvement.* This makes me want to weep. But also I am curious to read it. Everything everyone reads on the subway always seems interesting to me; I always want to be reading it over their shoulders.

February 23. A woman on the street who so embodies a particular time and place: Rome, 1953. She must be in her seventies. She is wearing a navy blue suit, low-heeled navy blue shoes, a navy blue and white kerchief, navy blue cotton gloves, a navy blue and white umbrella (which she does not open, as there seems to be no sign of rain). David has seen the same woman, and he agrees with me: it is Rome, 1953. But neither of us knows why.

February 25. Emily tells me about some graffiti she saw in the elevator of her building in St. Petersburg. It said, in Russian: "My father is not your father."

February 26. The Diallo verdict paralyzes me with political despair. Paralysis because I simply cannot understand how anyone could apply the beautiful and precious word "innocent" to what those cops did. How anyone could say: Guilty of no wrong. I can't look at the paper before I write, or writing seems hopeless to me. I have to make sure that my glance doesn't fall on W. Bush's face in the morning, or my writing day is spoilt.

March 4. Thinking of the Voglers, who lived across the street when I was growing up. Bertha Vogler. Where could she possibly have come from? She had a laugh whose silliness was oppressive, a laugh that traversed the space from the silly to the insane. She wore silly hats, with too many flowers and velvet ribbons that tied under the chin. She always seemed old and out of the running, out of any possible running there might be. She taught piano, but even my family knew she wasn't good enough, even for us. My grandfather, being Italian, was musical; he sang arias and belonged to the choir. Occasionally he stayed in the city after work for standing room at the Metropolitan Opera. And my Aunt Marie married Buddy, who was musical, whose father had been a professional musician, who had played in the marching bands of John Philip Sousa. So we knew Bertha Vogler was beneath us. Music was the only mark my grandfather left on the family, which otherwise was shaped entirely by my grandmother's heavy tread. Marie was his favorite daughter because she had a beautiful voice. She was the coldest, the least favorite of her mother. All of us cousins took music lessons from people who were too good for us, too serious, but we continued with them, even though only the grandchildren of the man who had played with John Philip Sousa were any good.

We suspected that Bertha Vogler might be from the South, and we knew that nothing serious, nothing important could come from there.

Bertha's husband was named Happy. Sometimes he was called Hap. And he *was* happy, and also a creature of hap, for he arrived only occasionally and unpredictably. He was a Merchant Marine and I think I confused being a Merchant Marine with being a pirate. He had a pirate's high color, a brilliant gash of a smile. His voice roared. His steps were large; he could cross the street in one loping bound. We knew somehow (although how we could have known except by Bertha's telling us I don't know) that when he walked through the door at his first arrival, he would lift Bertha up and carry her somewhere. Upstairs? To their bedroom? It was not possible to imagine them as lovers. For one thing, Bertha's breath was appalling. Terrible in a way that frightened me, that made me worry in advance that I might have to talk to her, that made me beg my mother not to offer her rides. Once, in that time when I was interested in being penitential, I would make myself stand close to her so I could endure the scourge of her breath to atone for my own sins or to free souls from Purgatory. Did Happy not notice her breath? Did he not notice her silliness, her foolish, birdy gestures? Her ridiculous hats?

When he came home, the whole neighborhood took on new vividness. We understood the vivid again, or we remembered it. We learned a new figure of the masculine, something free from fatigue or the appetite for punishment or the urge to exact fealty, obedience: the bent knee. We learned something about abundance. Happy always brought

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home treasure; it was as if things hung off him, precious stuff, rich and strange. Once he walked into our house with bunches and bunches of red grapes in his arms. None of us had ever seen so many grapes, it was as if we'd never seen so much life collected, embraced, and right before our eyes. He laughed, he called out our names, each of them, loud, loud, and my grandmother laughed, and soon we were all laughing at the joke, or at the pleasure of our own names, at the plenitude he had spread out on the kitchen table, white, enamel, with a thin black seam down the center.

Then Happy didn't come home anymore. He died at sea. His death seemed to make no difference to Bertha, and I didn't understand that, and if she ever rang our bell, I hid; and if I ever heard her laugh, I felt I had been cursed.

March 9. The Virginia Woolf event at Town Hall. Everyone performs at an extremely high level. Someone says to me: Well, you were certainly playing the heavy. My talk on *The Waves* concentrated on style, technique, did homage to VW's (to me) heartbreaking effort to get down what it is to be alive, joyously, yet horrified. So I feel that I appeared excessively earnest, excessively serious, humorless, and I castigate myself. Yet I did what I wanted; I witnessed the part dearest to me. It occurs to me that everyone has his or her own VW: the sharp-minded critic, the novelist of English life, the bitchy diarist, the feminist theorist. Mine is the writer of lyrical sentences, which I have studied and learned by heart. I don't think any other great writer has so many sides that he or she can call up, so many different brands of allegiances. Certainly not Proust or Joyce, whom one loves only as novelists. A sign of her greatness, her breadth. Yet for years she was written off as hyper-genteel, irrelevant. In my mind, she is always Mrs. Woolf. She may be the greatest of them all. I thank God I never had to meet her.

March 13. A weekend with Maureen, whom I have loved and been loved by for nearly forty years. We met as children: thirteen years old. Both of us living most of our lives with men, we haven't been alone together since college. At fifty, we still have to leave places because we're laughing inappropriately. At a lecture on cancer-preventing foods, we lose it because the lecturer describes an experiment in which white mice who were fed blueberry extract did better at balancing on a log than the non-blueberry mice. It's called the "lumberjack experiment." We escape into the hall, holding each other up, creating images of mice in plaid jackets, in caps with earflaps, little hatchets. The absolute joy of that kind of helpless laughter.

I come back to New Paltz for two days of writing by myself. I am utterly happy here.

Listening to the Schubert Quintet, which may be the one piece of music I know well. Reading what and only as much as I want: no lecture to prepare, I can be silent about what I've read. My happiness makes me feel tearful and I allow myself to weep. I would like to write from the place of tears, because tears are by necessity honest, or they are for me, because I never like to be seen crying. My need to be seen embodying a particular quality—originality, depth, honesty, courage—is always the thing that gets in the way of the truthfulness I really want. If only I could get rid of the desire to be seen, admired. I admire myself, however, for the food I've chosen for my solitary supper. An artichoke, steamed. Roast chicken, asparagus, yellow peppers, an orange for dessert. I think, probably that's a kind of admiration I ought to allow. Or at least not feel I have to work against. It would be wonderful to be like the angel at the Rheims cathedral door: amused, accepting. I am very, very far from this.

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BLACKWELL JOURNALS

The Yale Review

Edited by J. D. McClatchy

"I have been lucky enough to see some recent issues of *The Yale Review*. It's more than reassuring to see that this fine journal is continuing to do precisely what our best literary quarterlies have always done—to keep us abreast of fine new work, to help us to be more responsive and engaged critics, thinkers, and readers."

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• B O O K S •

What explains the perennial appeal of certain "children's books" to readers who are no longer young?

A distinguished literary couple compares notes on the admixture of humor, logic, and invention confected by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, *originally published in 1865.*

REREADING

Indestructible Alice

ANNE BERNAYS and JUSTIN KAPLAN

ANNE BERNAYS: The temptation, on rereading a classic like *Alice in Wonderland*, a book that succeeds on every conceivable level, is to turn the pancake into a crêpe. I prefer to think of it in its most basic form: an adventure story brimming with adversity, with a strong heroine and a cast of minor characters each of whom, within a few words of their introduction, radiates as much personality as Jane Eyre or Dorothy Gale.

I was so late learning to read that my mother dragged me off to be tested for various malfunctions, including, I suspect, low brain power. I didn't master that very difficult skill until I was almost eight years old, and I am still a slow reader. The first book I read was a collection of ferocious Norse fairy tales, called *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, with Klimt-like illustrations by Kay Nielson. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was the second. My mother bought the book for me at Young Books, Inc., on Madison Avenue—a store that, sadly, no longer exists. Published by the Macmillan Company in 1937, the book has a hard blue cloth cover, in the middle of which is the Cheshire Cat, minus torso. Over the years I've kept it close at hand, as I have *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*. The books that you read as a child tend to adhere to the skin of your memory.

But even if I hadn't read *Alice* when I was nine or ten, I would remember it as poignantly as a first kiss (his name was Donald, and, like me, he had kinky hair). Lewis Carroll's story is almost abstract in its simplicity. Rereading it this time as a nitpicky writing teacher, I looked for wasted words. I couldn't find any, not even in the internal dialogues that Alice conducts with herself. (Internal dialogue is a technique most fiction writers try to avoid. An editor once told me that readers don't want to hear what characters are *thinking*, they want to see what they're doing and hear what they're saying. You can go too far in removing the stuff inside a character's head, but I know what he meant: stick to your story. Lewis Carroll sticks to his story.)

When you read *Alice* as a child, you're won over by the suspense, by the humor shadowed by anxiety, and by the animal creatures who confront Alice, demonstrating a logic that always works for them. When you read the book in the year 2000, as an adult woman, you're heartened to find that Alice is indestructible, and not only physically. She also seems to have a psyche with the consistency of a rock and the chief property of rubber; she bounces right back from insult and threat, with more self-con-

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Justin Kaplan and Anne Bernays are co-authors of *The Language of Names*, published in 1997. Bernays's eight novels include *Growing up Rich* and *Professor Romeo*. Kaplan has written biographies of Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Lincoln Steffens; his *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain* won a Pulitzer Prize. He also edited the 1992 edition of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. Bernays and Kaplan live in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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fidence than Emma Woodhouse, more grit than Mattie Ross. I love this exchange between Alice and the Cheshire Cat:

> "Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat, "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."
>
> "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
>
> "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."
>
> Alice didn't think that proved it at all . . .

If you hear in this exchange the kind of edgy humor that ended up in novels like *Catch-22*, you're right. Carroll's view of the effort that most of us make in order to keep our balance is so decidedly his own that he seems to have invented a form. I have heard academics whose territory this is argue about whether *Alice* is or is not a novel. They can agree that it's fiction, but the form it takes is as odd as its plot and characters, defying attempts to put it in a particular category.

The descriptive that begs to be applied to Alice herself is *intrepid*. Like so many straightforward adjectives (try *conceited* or *proud*) that are lying more or less fallow today, this word suggests an explorer equipped with bravery, curiosity, and a desire to return home in one piece. I tend to shy away from lowering a feminist grid over books written before the era of the feminist. Still, no one would dispute that Lewis Carroll, for whatever reasons, was persuaded that girls can be as intrepid as boys. At the end of chapter 2, after nearly drowning in her own tears, Alice pulls herself together and takes charge: "there was a Duck and a Dodo, a Lory and an Eaglet and several other curious creatures. Alice led the way and the whole party swam to shore." You can't help loving her pluck, even if she occasionally seems naïve, a perfect mark for the tricksters into whose company she unwittingly falls.

> "They were learning to draw," the Dormouse went on, yawning and rubbing its eyes, for it was getting very sleepy; "and they drew all manner of things—everything that begins with an M——"
>
> "Why with an M?" said Alice.
>
> "Why not?" said the March Hare.

The child reading *Alice* finds the heroine splendidly prepared to complete her journey, to land on her feet when threatened, to stand up to her tormentors. Reading the book as an adult, you see that she is pretty complicated. On the one hand, she's an innocent, too dense to recognize danger when it's right in front of her nose. On the other, her logical clarity and common sense make super weapons against the emotional chaos that rules in Wonderland. In each encounter, Alice is momentarily thrown off her game, only to have the last and most decisive word:

> "The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at her for a moment like a wild beast, began screaming, "Off with her head! Off ——"
>
> "Nonsense!" said Alice, very loudly and decidedly, and the Queen was silent.

By relentless pursuit (she's hardly the most accommodating guest; some might say she's often a pain in the neck), Alice manages to make the other fellow paint himself into a logical corner. Once there, he's lost the engagement. At the Mad Hatter's tea party, Alice asks, "'But what happens when you come to the beginning again?' 'Suppose we change the subject,' the March Hare interrupted, yawning."

You can't really talk about *Alice* without mentioning the drawings by John Tenniel, who seems to have understood this book at its deepest level. His work doesn't just complement Carroll's story: it's married to it. The drawing of Alice at the beginning of chapter 2 shows a prettily dressed and perfectly proportioned little girl—except for her neck, which is about one-third the length of the rest of her. Instead of lying more or less flat, her hair sticks out as if electrified; her eyes are huge and black. This rendering of a girl in distress is truly terrifying; I was scared of it as a child, and even now it makes me uneasy. Carroll's dream is Tenniel's nightmare, the duchess uglier than evil, the Mad Hatter grotesque.

The book leaves residue. When I wrote my seventh novel, *The Address Book*, I borrowed characterization and mood from *Alice*, having reread it for the third or fourth time. My novel is about an editor, Alicia Baer, who loses her address book. When she finds the book there are five new names in it, in her handwriting. She visits the five people whose names she

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has found; they know her, but she doesn't know them—or does she? Almost from the start, the reader is introduced into a world that makes about as much sense as Alice's Wonderland. I gave each of the address-book characters a specific trait exhibited by one of five principal characters in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* There's one named Wilma Fearing, whose "eyes were a deep, gemlike green and darted rapidly back and forth across the page." This is Bill, the lizard. Alicia Baer works for a publishing company called Griffin House, named for the Gryphon. Some of the characters' traits are superficial, others more weighty. This embroidery was a game I played with myself; as far as I know, no one who read the novel picked up on it.

Alice never stops. The composer Irving Fine, among others, wrote wonderful music based on the perverted poetry in the book. There's even a California society whose mission it is to convince people that *Alice*'s true author was not Lewis Carroll but Queen Victoria—thus raising *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into the rarefied company of works deemed too dazzlingly original to have been written by just any-old-body.

JUSTIN KAPLAN: For me, the biggest surprise in reading *Alice* after more years than I'd like to count is that I feel I've never been away. "At the time it all seemed quite natural," Lewis Carroll writes when the White Rabbit first appears to Alice. It still seems quite natural to me. The impression Carroll's book left was formative and indelible. *Alice* is as vivid as a dream, often a terrifying one from which you would like to wake; but this one doesn't go away when you finally open your eyes. It's not "just" a children's story, of course, and there are any number of ways of unstitching it as a fabric of symbols, psychological, political, and otherwise. But like all great children's stories—from "Hansel and Gretel" and "Little Red Riding Hood" to the Oz books and Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*—it contains elements of cruelty, punishment, panic and claustrophobia (the price Alice pays for being too big a creature for a small place), and pure fright (tiny Alice menaced by "an enormous puppy").

"Dream child" Alice, the only human being in her strange world, has no parents, an invisible sister, and no companion to look to except for her cat, Dinah. Heads would roll, if the Queen had her way. Ignorant of Kafka, a young reader could still be frightened, as I was, by the sinuous turnings of the mouse's tale—"I'll be judge, I'll be jury . . . I'll try the whole cause, and condemn you to death." The verdict and sentence are that much more alarming because, after all, it's only a mouse who's saying this to Alice. Menace is integral with even the more benign elements of the story. You have entered Carroll's brilliant world of transformations, of alarming incongruities of size and scale, and of grotesque morphs and creatures. *Alice* is a triumph of illusionism: once you accept its often nightmarish world, you never leave it; but, like Alice, you are grateful at the end that some degree of equilibrium has been reached, that things are as we know them to be. "Off with her head!" the Queen shouts. "'Who cares for *you*!' said Alice, (she had grown to her full size by this time,) 'you're nothing but a pack of cards!'"

I first read *Alice,* when I was about eight years old, in an edition I have long since lost and no longer remember. What I do remember most vividly from that first reading is John Tenniel's picture of Bill—a lizard, of all things—flying out of the chimney to "a general chorus of 'There goes Bill!'" Those words, along with the vertical placement of Bill on the printed page, stuck in my head, together with my first notion of what a cucumber-frame was. Now I'm rereading *Alice* in a shabby little Bantam paperback priced at $3.95, even though there's not a penny of royalties the publisher has to pay. The Bantam *Alice* is bulked out by a fifteen-page editorial introduction, which, like most prolegomena of that sort, I have no intention of reading. It's my Alice I've come to revisit. On the cover is a sweet-natured illustration in color by an artist named Milo Winter, a familiar name to me—he illustrated the *Aesop for Children* my father gave me in February 1932. Judging from the cover, I'd say that Winter's interpretation of Carroll could hardly differ more from that of Tenniel, whose illustrations appear within.

"What's the use of a book," Alice asks, "without pictures or conversations?" For all its brilliant conversations and verbal play, *Alice* is in the end a supremely visual creation. Whatever the mooted working relationship between Lewis

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Carroll and John Tenniel, the great *Punch* cartoonist, their collaboration produced an almost uniquely seamless joining of pictures (forty-two of them) and text. You can't imagine illustrations being any better. Other artists have tried their hand at *Alice*, but Tenniel's work is canonical—as definitive as any such thing can be. Sometimes it produces a more indelible impression than the text itself—for example, Carroll's playful variations on "to grin like a Cheshire Cat." This phrase "of indeterminate origin," as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it, precedes *Alice* by almost a century, but we assume reflexively that it's Carroll's invention, because he has made the phrase his own. This is only right: aside from the Cat, the two most celebrated products of Cheshire—the county in the northwest of England—are its cheese and Carroll himself, born in the village of Daresbury.

Tenniel's three or four avatars of the Cheshire Cat have the same eerie quality as the surrealist Odilon Redon's floating gnomes and eyeballs. In their vehemence of line and fantastic, gothic elaboration, others of Tenniel's pictures remind me of early German woodcuts: for example, the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle, and, to move ahead, the Jabberwock in *Through the Looking-Glass*. I've just learned by reading the fine print in the great eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* that "Tenniel's wonderful observation has been conducted, and his knowledge accumulated, literally though a single eye, the other having been lost during a fencing bout in his youth."

No book I read as a child is as rich a playground for language as *Alice*. The puns (a whole chapter of them) are a little wearisome and predictable the second and third time around, but not the first. Carroll's hilarious parodies—of Isaac Watts, Robert Southey, and the "Twinkle, Twinkle" poets Ann and Jane Taylor—are wonderful in their own right, regardless of the identity of their targets. *Alice* is also a torture chamber for logic—"There's no sort of use in knocking," the Frog-Footman says, "because I'm on the same side of the door as you are." How can you behead a cat that's all head and no body? How can you have a grin without a cat? For me it was a short way from these questions to more perturbing ones about where the universe ends and when time began.

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Leveling Bohemia

ROCHELLE GURSTEIN

AMERICAN MODERNS:
BOHEMIAN NEW YORK AND THE CREATION OF A NEW CENTURY
By Christine Stansell. Metropolitan Books. $30.

For a few short years before World War I, Greenwich Village was home to a thriving bohemia. The dream of revolution was very much alive: not only would politics, society, and work be made anew along socialist or anarchist lines, but love, romance, and marriage would be radically reformed, creating unions of "free love" born of equality and candor. Spontaneity, creativity, self-expression, freedom, and openness in politics, in the arts, and in love—this was the radical vision of the first American bohemians. And it was a commitment to anarchism that joined these projects. As Margaret Anderson, the editor of the *Little Review*, put it: "Anarchism and art are in the world for exactly the same kind of reason." Hutchins Hapgood, a writer and the model of the bohemian intellectual, made the same link when he called anarchism "the fine art of the proletariat."

A shared contempt for bourgeois conventions united not only disaffected intellectuals, artists, and Wobblies, but an eclectic mix of people. Mabel Dodge's fabled salon on lower Fifth Avenue brought together, in her words, "Socialists, Trade-Unionists, Anarchists, Suffragists, Poets, Relations, Lawyers, Murderers, 'Old Friends,' Psycho-analysists [*sic*], I.W.W.'s, Single Taxers, Birth Controlists, Artists, Modern Artists, Club Women, Woman's-place-is-in-the-home Women." Their conversations, disagreements, fistfights, and love affairs immediately entered society-page gossip columns and historic lore. In the millionaire-rebel Dodge, all the possibilities (and limitations) of Greenwich Village come together. She was at the side of the most infamous anarchists of the day—Margaret Sanger, Emma Goldman, Bill Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn—in giving aid to strikers at the Paterson silk factory and then, with agitator-journalists like John Reed and artists like John Sloan, she helped publicize the workers' plight in a dramatic re-enactment of the strike at Madison Square Garden. As one of the organizers of the scandalous Armory Show, she helped bring modern art to America. And Dodge was a pioneer in free love and an early convert to psychoanalysis as well.

The seemingly endless possibilities of this first American bohemia—its promise of freedom and happiness, its union of art and revolution—has enthralled later generations of would-be rebels, even as Greenwich Village has long since ceased to be an actual haven for free spirits. Its myth, nonetheless, has proved astonishingly durable. Bohemia, because of its repudiation of the mind-numbing workaday world, refuses to die; but now it lives on as an implacable habit of mind. One need only recall the cynical reason given earlier this year for exhibiting the lackluster "Sensation" show at the Brooklyn Museum—"the controversy would help to bring more audience [*sic*] into the museum"—to see just how bloodless bohemianism has become.

Given the domestication of bohemia, one turns to Christine Stansell's *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* with anticipation. In the prologue, Stansell declares that her history will not indulge in the "mythmaking" that began with the first bohemians and has been carried on by popular movies like *Reds*. She will see through the myths and nostalgia, for she recognizes that the bohemians' "collective effort to fashion modern possibilities—an effort at once cooperative and idealistic, conflicted and self-deluding—shapes our expectations of American culture to this day." In view of the seriousness and scope of this endeavor, as well as the time she has spent read-

Rochelle Gurstein is the author of *The Repeal of Reticence*. She lives in New York City.

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ing letters, memoirs, novels, little magazines, and secondary literature—her footnotes exceed sixty pages—I should like to report that Stansell has succeeded in providing a critical reappraisal of bohemia that deepens our understanding of both its origin and its fate. Regrettably, she has not.

Rather, she has produced a synthesis of the large body of recent scholarship from the perspective of cultural history. Stansell presents us with essentially the same figures who were at the Dodge salon, but with this crucial difference: she reconfigures this assemblage of radical nonconformists according to politically correct lines. In her hands, Greenwich Village, the home of art and revolution, becomes an early experiment in social diversity, a self-conscious effort to form a democratic, egalitarian community that includes women, workers, immigrants, Jews, and a few rich socialites, but, unfortunately, not blacks and rarely homosexuals. This is a novel emphasis, but it is questionable whether it is substantial enough to merit a 338-page study. After all, the list of Dodge's guests that I quoted above is a staple of writing about the Village, and no one has ever suggested that the Village was an exclusive preserve of privileged white males; Stansell cannot imagine that she is overturning some well-established interpretation.

How, then, is our picture of Greenwich Village revised and enlarged if we look at it through the lens of social identity? First, ideas that were its basis, such as anarchism and freedom, fade away, and its characteristic mood—iconoclastic, combative, "pagan"—recedes into the background. For Stansell, social inclusiveness is bohemia's all-important feature: it was the "first full-bodied alternative to an established cultural elite, a milieu that brought outsiders and their energies into the very heart of the American intelligentsia," and its prime article of faith was that "the culture was that much richer for infusions from outsiders." The first chapters establish who these outsiders were. Often Stansell seems to delight in the promiscuity of the mix: "The moderns were a raffish lot. . . . Some were revolutionary socialists, others moderate progressives; some were middle-class, native-born, and college-educated; others had come up the hard way, from the *shtetlach* of Russia and the hard-bitten factory towns of New England."

Her delight in the mix apparently grows out of her belief that it represents democracy: the presence of women and "immigrant Jews—not assimilated Germans but Eastern Europeans just off the boat—as well as a dash of others from humble class and ethnic origins contributed to a milieu that made democracy a palpable experience rather than a civic catchword." She admires the "free-wheeling, frequently erotic and knowing talk" of many Village "free speech" clubs, which "opened out to a heterogeneous range of speakers, interlocutors, and topics." Stansell's history, however, provides little evidence that the first bohemians ever thought of democracy in today's rather flimsy terms of diversity and inclusion. After all, it was not liberal democracy but anarchism that was the political passion of Emma Goldman, John Reed, Max Eastman, Margaret Anderson, and other major figures whom Stansell treats.

What is more, her insistence on anachronistic categories of identity gives a misleading impression of bohemia. Here is a typical description from Stansell: "The early crossover into bohemia was possible for other outsiders [than women]—a few Italian immigrants, sons and daughters of the Irish tenements, American-born workers like Floyd Dell—but not for blacks." Yet when she quotes the actual bohemians about their milieu, they do not sound like sociologists. One participant at the Village Liberal Club described the members: "Girls who had run away from their parents, women whose husbands had left them, Jewish anarchists, professional beggars of the intellectual order, visiting celebrities, Russian revolutionaries." Clearly it was not an awareness of gender, ethnicity, or class that drew people to Greenwich Village, but rather a self-conscious estrangement from conventional mores, whether WASP or *shtetl*.

At the close of her discussion of the social composition of bohemia, Stansell returns to her theme of inclusiveness and offhandedly mentions Randolph Bourne's resonant phrase, "trans-national America," calling it "the concourse toward which downtown radicals would yearn." Given the importance of this idea to her argument, one would expect Stansell to discuss the essay bearing that name, but she does not. This is a serious omission, since Bourne's trans-

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national America was no hodgepodge of "outsiders," untutored and parochial, coming together to talk. His ideal was inspired by his contact with "the acclimatized Jew, the acclimatized Scandinavian or Italian," whom he had met at Columbia University. By "acclimatized," Bourne meant immigrants who had retained the distinctiveness of their native cultures but, in becoming American, escaped their provinciality. In this way, they attained something larger—an "intellectual internationalism," a "cosmopolitan outlook"—which, for Bourne, held the promise of a renewed, transnational America.

Just as Stansell slights the intellectual foundation upon which her book rests, she provides no account of the "established cultural elite" except for passing references to "a fading patriciate of old men holed up in their gentlemen's clubs" and their "smug faith that culture was the domain of the well-born and tasteful." (The race-class-gender habit of mind even dictates the terms of her caricatures.) Yet, by neglecting even a brief account of Victorian ideas and sensibilities, Stansell fails to make sense of their staying power, especially the belief that literature furnishes moral lessons, which was also the first principle of forward-looking, realist writers who sought to shake bourgeois complacency by telling the truth about life. So when she reports on Margaret Anderson's break with Emma Goldman over her "moralistic compulsion to champion art only on political—that is, improving—grounds," Stansell seems disappointed by Goldman's apparent stodginess.

This inattention to Victorian culture also handicaps Stansell when she tries to establish what was new or radical about bohemia. After a discussion of readers' responses to the journal *The Masses*, she weakly notes, "There must have been something wonderful and inspiring that jumped out from its pages, although it's hard to get a fix on it now." Had she paid attention to the contents of its articles, stories, art, and cartoons, instead of focusing almost exclusively on its layout, design, editorial meetings, and readership, Stansell might have made *The Masses'* dream of political and artistic emancipation come alive. Is it really so difficult to imagine why readers might have been compelled by a magazine whose contributors had been urged to be "arrogant, impertinent, in bad taste," and "to everlastingly attack old systems, old morals, old prejudices"? (These words of John Reed do not appear in Stansell's account.) Stansell's interest in a favorite topic of cultural history, audience formation, instead leads her to ask: How did *The Masses* "purvey its iconoclasm to a national audience?" How did it "sell itself?" She seems unaware that she misrepresents its tone and domesticates its radicalism when she suggests that "the journal seems to have exported an intangible nexus of bohemian affiliations, some assurance that, even if you were immobilized out in the provinces . . . you wouldn't always be stuck there."

For all Stansell's enthusiasm about the strides the first bohemians made toward social inclusiveness, she never lets us forget their repeated failures to reach today's vaunted standards. Even the most open-minded radicals "ignored the travails of African America." Even the most sympathetic partisan writers romanticized the downtrodden as "simple peasants, bubbling over with talk and song." Even the most emancipated men were "misogynists" filled with "masculine resentment." And except for Margaret Anderson, who "lived openly . . . as a lesbian," "homosexual preferences had little place in semipublic life." Here Stansell is only engaging in what has become a conventional, even obligatory exercise in contemporary cultural history. Yet such indictments, which come at predictable intervals, feel like non sequiturs, for they neither flow out of the past nor lead to further reflection. If a person as outraged by injustice as Emma Goldman "never spoke a word about lynching," then Stansell needs to question not only the obdurate nature of bigotry but the invisibility of the suffering of black people during this period. Unfortunately, such questions never appear, which once again suggests that history ruled by modern-day ideology not only distorts the past but also constricts the historical imagination.

The writing of cultural history today betrays a certain contempt of the dead, for cultural historians rarely take their subjects seriously in their own terms. Not only are their subjects' writings and public conduct held to standards not of their own making, but their privacy is routinely invaded. In the case of the bohemians, who were champions and practitioners of free love, Stansell has a legitimate interest in

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examining their published works on the subject, which she does in passing. But she is also curious about the way free-lovers managed to put their ideas into practice. It would have been one thing to explore their memoirs, especially since many of her figures left behind them all too painful pictures of their fraught experiments in intimacy. But it is another to print passages from intimate letters never meant for publication and to subject them to extended analysis. Stansell has spent much time reading the correspondence of Greenwich Village couples, and she is especially taken with Hutchins Hapgood and Neith Boyce. Theirs was obviously a difficult marriage, as they tried as best they could to live in truth, which meant revealing their many affairs. Yet there is something glib, even callous, when Stansell glosses their most intimate confessions as "honesty as aphrodisiac" or "disclosure was the turn on."

Her tone sinks even lower when she turns to the passionate love letters Emma Goldman wrote to Ben Reitman—which she refers to as "the raunchiest performance of free-love talk." Stansell has the presumption to provide us with "the key to Goldman's persona as a smutty conversant": Goldman "glamorized Reitman as a working-class primitive endowed with supranormal sexual appetites that had developed unchecked in his vulgar lowlife upbringing." The same gender-class-ethnicity framework that Stansell used earlier to turn rebellious individualists into representatives of minorities is now used to explain the mysterious object of another's desire. The first instance dehumanizes history, for such language reduces actual flesh-and-blood people to lifeless abstractions. But there is something smug and condescending about a historian who feels compelled to pry into the inviolable realm of another's passions. And the tawdriness of Stansell's academic purple prose raises the specter that a stranger can never accurately render, let alone understand, another person's private imaginings of eros. Surely the daring, free-spirited bohemians deserve better. Those who want to learn about them should consult Henry May's *The End of American Innocence,* which appeared in 1959 and has yet to be surpassed. As for understanding the course of events that has enervated bohemia in our own time—that book has yet to be written.

A Book Like No Other

GENOME: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SPECIES IN 23 CHAPTERS
By Matt Ridley. HarperCollins. $26.

Reviewed by AARON E. HIRSH

Sigmund Freud once wrote that three momentous discoveries had displaced man from his privileged place in the universe. Copernicus expelled him from the center of the solar system, setting him instead on a rock winging gadfly-like around the sun. Darwin plucked him from his God-given seat of dominion over the kingdom of life and hung him on an unlikely twig of a branch called primates. And finally, Freud himself removed man from the helm of his own personality, replacing him with a ribald and ruffian captain, the subconscious. With a good deal more modesty, though no less gravity, Matt Ridley announces that a fourth revolution is afoot:

> Being able to read the genome will tell us more about our origins, our evolution, our nature and our minds than all the efforts of science to date. . . . In just a few short years we will have moved from knowing almost nothing about our genes to knowing everything.

Ridley refers to the Human Genome Project, a gargantuan effort by governments and industry to determine the complete sequence of chemical letters—four compounds commonly represented by A, G, C, and T—that compose a person's DNA. While the Project receives prominent billing in the preface, it all but disappears for the rest of the book, ceding the stage to dozens of biological inquiries—projects with a small *p*—that have shaped our view of the natural world. Thus, in a rather pleasant surprise, "the autobiography of a species" turns out to be a delightfully entertaining variety show, featur-

Aaron E. Hirsh is a Fellow at the Center for Computational Genetics and Biological Modeling at Stanford University.

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ing an eclectic farrago of the most intriguing personalities, fascinating findings, and captivating tales of the last one hundred and fifty years of biology.

Here is Hermann Joe Müller, a brilliant but crusty Jewish eugenicist who showed a perverse penchant for contrarian emigration: he fled America for 1932 Germany, fled Germany for 1933 Leningrad (where he enraged Stalin with an autographed copy of his book), fled Leningrad for the Spanish Civil War, and ended up at the end of it all in Stockholm, accepting the Nobel Prize for his discovery that X-rays cause permanent changes in the material of inheritance. Here is Carleton Gajdusek, gleaning from a New Guinean habit of eating one's ancestors a crucial clue to the surprising cause of mad cow disease. And here are LINE-I and others of its kind, clever little strips of DNA that reproduce in your genome, littering it with millions of copies of themselves.

Ridley writes of science and scientists with equal mastery, maintaining a driving pace as he reveals only the essentials of character and a concise summary of the science. Indeed, his narrative technique seems more familiar from the fiction of Kundera and Calvino than from most other science writing. He careens ahead, telling a fast-paced and gripping version of his story. But when we arrive at the end, we find him thinking twice, wondering whether he got it right, or even told the truth—"It is time for a cold shower," he confesses; "the author of this book has been misleading you"—and thus he lures us to loop back with him, meditating on the tale, adding complexity, and probing still more deeply. Without exception, this technique makes for a bracing read.

In just one area, however, Ridley's talent for narrative gets the better of him. There is a set of studies from the field of behavioral genetics that have been widely publicized though dimly understood. The studies apply relatively elementary statistical analysis to personal attributes such as "openness," "agreeableness," or "intelligence," appropriating our broadly interpretable and commonplace words to label a score on a test one takes in half an hour. The IQ test, for instance, does not measure "intelligence" the way we use the word every day, in part because we use the word in so many different ways. (We should rather call this test "x, a pretty good predictor of how you'll do in high school.") Ridley does not dwell on the absurdity of assigning a number to a vaguely defined and infinitely faceted personal trait, but this is arguably not such a grave omission, since it is fairly self-evident. There are, however, a number of very important shortcomings in these studies that would be impossible to glean from Ridley's reporting. Throughout the book, the exigencies of style and pace require Ridley to skip the mechanical details that underlie the scientific results he reports. That's fine—in fact, well advised—until those very mechanics are either vital to our interpretation of the science or riddled with methodological holes.

I want to focus on one kind of simplification, because it is common in contexts beyond this book. It is apparent in this passage: "The conclusion that all these studies converge upon is that about half of your IQ was inherited, and less than a fifth was due to the environment you shared with your siblings—the family." Let's move from intelligence to something less complicated—height, for instance. What would you say if I asked you how much of a person's height is due to her parents, and how much to her environment? To answer such a question, we'd merely need to find a bunch of people who have no parents, and compare them to a bunch of people who have no environment. Evidently, it's a meaningless question. And the reason it's meaningless is that it pretends to separate two things that are in fact inseparable. Ridley knows this. Indeed, at one point he writes, "You inherit not your IQ but your ability to develop a high IQ under certain environmental circumstances. How does one parcel that one into nature and nurture?" Amen. But how, too, does one reconcile this disclosure with Ridley's recurring statement that this much is genetic and that much familial? This is one place where the postmodern narration of alternate versions of the same story might not be such a good policy—especially when the simple, striking, and altogether misleading version of the story may wend its way into broader public discourse.

It is rotten of me to dwell grumpily upon two or three troublesome chapters of an otherwise very beautiful book. And to categorically condemn those chapters would be to overlook the fact that Ridley returns to many of his simplifi-

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cations, weaving them into a more careful discussion of the deeper implications of biological research. Just how vital it is for us to be clear-headed about these implications is evident in a discussion that is now commonplace in our justice system. In ascertaining an individual's guilt, courts frequently seek to determine whether his criminality is due to "biochemical dysfunction." What does this mean, exactly? As far as any biologist knows, the attributes of an individual are the consequence of an ineffably complex interplay of genes and environment—biology and biography, inextricably interwoven. And whatever their respective roles in the etiology of the individual, genes and environment are both mediated by the biochemistry of a brain and a body, and they are both forms of determination. One is no more or less compatible with notions of free will than the other. I will not reveal where Ridley heads with this ineluctable determinism, because that might steal his philosophical fire and expose the end of this gripping scientific mystery story. But I will say that he seems to believe very sincerely that the present revolution, unlike the three that preceded it, will not drive us further from our seat of self-control, but rather will restore us to it.

By the end of this book—which begins as a variety show of biology, turns into a mystery, and ends as a meditation on free will and necessity—you may well believe at least half of Ridley's momentous augury. Being able to read the genome will indeed tell us a great deal about "our origins, our evolution, our nature and our minds." But no, we will not move, "in a few short years, from knowing almost nothing about our genes to knowing everything." And the reason we will not is that the metaphor of a text goes only so far. In truth, the genome is not a book that can be understood as we read off the sequence of three billion chemical letters. As Ridley's tales make vividly clear, modern biology's effort to understand our three billion letters did not begin with the first letter read by a laboratory sequencing machine, and it will not end with the last. It began, arguably, when Charles Darwin opened his now famous notebook, hurriedly penned the portentous words "I think"—and then sketched an evolutionary tree. And it will end no time soon, because our genome is a book like no other. It is forever telling new tales, stories in the form of human beings.

Metropolis East

Shanghai, 1842–1949: The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City

By Stella Dong. William Morrow. $26.

Reviewed by
JEFFREY N. WASSERSTROM

Many otherwise intelligent people, misled by gaudy fiction [think Shanghai] an eerie place, peopled with sinister Orientals . . . and painted adventuresses casting spells. . . . But as the incipiently-disappointed believers in such yarns find out, all of this is but part of "the Shanghai illusion."

Shanghai: High Lights, Low Lights, Tael Lights, 1936

Seen from the river . . . the semi-skyscrapers of the Bund present, impressively, the façade of a great city. But it is only a façade. The spirit which dumped them upon this unhealthy mud-bank, thousands of miles from their kind, has been too purely and brutally competitive. . . . Nowhere [is there] anything civic at all.

Christopher Isherwood, 1939

The city that inspired these epigraphs no longer stands beside the muddy Huangpu River. Old Shanghai—which was divided into three separately administered districts, an International Settlement, a French Concession, and a Chinese Municipality—has been replaced by a unified metropolis sometimes called "New Shanghai" to distinguish it from its semi-colonial predecessor. Long gone are the foreign-run enclaves in which Westerners and Japanese enjoyed special privileges, granted to them by the "unequal treaties" that China's rulers were forced to sign in the aftermath of the three-year Opium War, which ended in 1842.

The all-Chinese-run New Shanghai is big—much bigger even than Old Shanghai. The old city sprawled westward from the waterfront Bund, with its luxury hotels and corporate headquarters topped by clock towers and

Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom teaches Chinese history at Indiana University. He is writing a book on Shanghai as a global city.

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domes with identical counterparts in New York or London. New Shanghai, by contrast, is planted firmly on both sides of the Huangpu, and the once semi-rural district of Pudong (East Shanghai), across from the Bund, has become a main focus of attention in the intensive programs of urban renewal, economic restructuring, and re-internationalization that have recently transformed New Shanghai from a dowdy socialist metropolis to a glittering post-socialist one.

The port city may no longer be the "Paris of the East," as it was once dubbed, but it is still possible for visitors on the Bund to fancy themselves back in the 1930s, the decade of most interest to journalist Stella Dong in her uneven but highly entertaining new popular history of Old Shanghai. Many of the semi-skyscrapers still stand, including the lavishly appointed Art Deco Cathay Hotel, formerly considered the city's quintessentially "ultramodern structure." The Cathay is now called the Peace Hotel, and the statues of Western adventurers in the riverfront park across the street have been replaced by ones honoring revolutionaries.

Not only have names and monuments been altered on the Bund; its general symbolic meaning has shifted as well, thanks to Pudong's development, which often seems a form of nationalist revenge in the form of architecture. Now, with some of the tallest buildings in the world standing across the water from them, none of the treaty-port structures look ultramodern at all. From the new super high-rises across the river, the Bund resembles a façade indeed, but not the kind Isherwood had in mind. It seems, instead, like part of a colonialist theme park or a Hollywood set.

In fact, if Old Shanghai lives on at all, it is in large part because of Hollywood. The treaty port may be a thing of the past, but it continues to be treated much as it always has been in works of "gaudy fiction"—a category that now includes video games and television series as well as novels and films. Whether it is represented as a "Paradise for Adventurers" (as some foreign "Shanghailanders" dubbed their metropolis) or a city whose "forty-eight-story skyscrapers stood atop twenty-four layers of hell" (as a Chinese journalist once put it), it still looms large in the Chinese and Western popular imaginations. Urban theorist Michael Sorkin's definition of Los Angeles fits Shanghai, too: a metropolis "nearly unviewable save through the fictive scrim of its mythologizers."

The illusion lingers despite the efforts of researchers and writers who labor to uncover the historical realities of Old Shanghai. Guidebooks and travelogues have sometimes contributed to this project. So, too, have scholarly monographs, and the past two decades have seen an academic publishing boom in Shanghai studies. In addition, a few popular histories have contributed to the demystification process. I say a few because many popular histories, while presented as nonfiction, are written by authors content to embrace the credo of the frontier journalist in a John Ford classic: when in doubt, "print the legend."

Not every popular history is of the myth-embracing variety. Lynn Pan, for example, has written two books that combine a desire to entertain with a concern for veracity. And while Dong's new book takes some poetic license, and contains a few minor errors in detail, it, too, is essentially sound. Even an academic Shanghai specialist should forgive a few flowery sentences designed to hook the general reader, such as an early one that claims the treaty port "ranked as the most pleasure-mad, rapacious, corrupt, strife-ridden, licentious, squalorous, and decadent city in the world." The last paragraph of Dong's first chapter, however, veers toward full-fledged extravagance. "Sinking her tentacles" into the "miasmic swamps" (it begins), Shanghai "shot up like a hot house flower." Then, too, Dong is periodically tempted to substitute glamorous illusion for social reality. Some chapters focus so intently on luxurious parties, nefarious plots, and the making of fortunes that readers can lose sight of how many local residents, Chinese and foreign alike, were ordinary people leading ordinary lives.

Despite these false steps, no other popular history has made such extensive use of the findings provided in the flurry of often very high-quality monographic studies published since 1980. Several fascinating academic books appeared too late for Dong to use them—for example, Lu Hanchao's *Beyond the Neon Lights*, Leo Lee's *Shanghai Modern*, and Robert Bickers's *Britain in China*. In addition, her bibliography lists few books in languages other than English. Still, Dong's detailed treatment of such topics as

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prostitution, police work, and factory life—the subjects of recent major monographs—demonstrates that the books in her bibliography are not merely listed there for show.

Another strength is Dong's excellent use of colorful quotes from a diverse array of contemporary commentators. She makes the most of the passionate reactions that the treaty port inspired, whether disdain (Harold Acton), rapture (Joseph von Sternberg), or a mixture of the two (many others). Not cited, somewhat surprisingly, are Isherwood's famous comments on Shanghai (which are found in *Journey to a War,* a curious, often moving work including sonnets by Isherwood's traveling companion, W. H. Auden). Dong does, however, let readers hear from other writers (Mao Dun, Pearl Buck, Edgar Snow) and from less-expected figures (for instance, Wallis Simpson, the divorcée who became the Duchess of Windsor).

A final attraction of Dong's book is that it appears at a time when thinking about history has a special relevance. The city's recent internationalization drive, though not colonialist, is leading to a re-emergence of various once-familiar phenomena, which as recently as a dozen years ago seemed gone forever. Nightlife is bustling again, just as it was before 1949. And it is easy once more to keep up with foreign affairs at the city's impressive new public library or at the Internet Café down the street. The metropolis is also once again a bustling international financial center, with its own stock market and with foreign investments pouring in, this time mainly from Hong Kong, Japan, and, via indirect channels, Taiwan.

There is a dark side, though, to this resurfacing of colonialist patterns with postmodern accents. Shanghai is not as dangerous a place now as it was in the 1920s, when it was routinely compared to Al Capone's Chicago, but organized crime—as well as the disorganized variety—is again a source of concern. Social cleavages are not yet as extreme as they were when Isherwood called Old Shanghai a place where "the gulf between society's two halves is too grossly wide for any bridge," but the gap between rich and poor, which narrowed after 1949, has been widening at an alarming pace.

It is hard to tell exactly where Shanghai is heading, and the different roles of foreigners in the city's treaty-port-era development and post-

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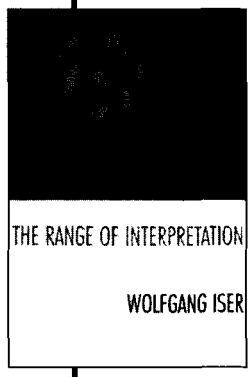

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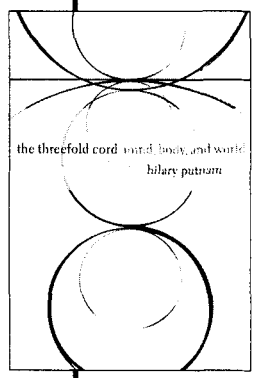

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socialist resurgence makes history an especially imprecise guide to its future. Still, some insights can be culled from the past.

One is that Shanghai is likely to remain, again like Los Angeles, a place where "city myths," as the California historian Mike Davis calls them, play a particularly pronounced role in shaping the course of urban history. Old Shanghai rose to prominence in part because the Shanghailanders, like their L.A. counterparts, were so good at selling an illusion: their metropolis was a place of fantastic transformations. Boosterism of a similar sort, though this time with a back-to-the-future quality, has been a major force in the latest wave of development in Shanghai, with advertisements claiming that the "magic is back in Shanghai."

On a related note, rivalries between Shanghai and other Chinese cities—which were relatively muted in the Maoist era of nationwide campaigns and central economic planning, but have begun to resurface lately—are likely to grow more intense. A century and a half ago, Old Shanghai struggled to catch up with a great southern metropolis, Canton, and ultimately surpassed it to become China's chief economic hub. It also competed with Beijing to be considered the main center of Chinese intellectual and artistic life. New Shanghai is engaged in the same kind of three-way competition for urban supremacy, though now the great southern metropolis involved is not Canton but Hong Kong.

Finally, if history is any guide, there will be political corollaries to the city's cultural and economic transitions. Dong reminds us that Old Shanghai was a center not just of trade but of radicalism, a center through which intellectual as well as sartorial fashions entered China. It was in Shanghai's French Concession that the Chinese Communist Party was founded, and in its International Settlement that iconoclastic journalists took advantage of relatively lax censorship laws to publish subversive journals. New Shanghai, like its predecessor, is often thought of as a metropolis where people care only about making money. Nevertheless, it is possible, perhaps even probable, that the opening decades of the twenty-first century will see the city by the Huangpu become an important site, not just for economic but also for political experimentation—as was true at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Revolution in Retrospect

THE WORLD SPLIT OPEN:
HOW THE MODERN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT CHANGED AMERICA
By Ruth Rosen. Viking. $34.95.

CRITICAL CONDITION:
FEMINISM AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY
By Susan Gubar. Columbia University Press. $24.50.

Reviewed by LINDA K. KERBER

Millennial moments have their uses, not least for feminists. Against the blurred microchanges of daily life (how different, really, was 1995 from 1996?), against the whining refrain of "I'm not a feminist, but . . . ," against the creeping nostalgia for the 1950s, there intruded the Big Questions: How has the world changed since 1900? Since 1000 A.D.? However sweeping the gaze, it is easy to appreciate the accomplishments of the struggle for women's liberation and the extent of changes in the relationships between men and women that have characterized our own time. It is even possible to invoke the romantic word *progress.*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, men in most nations had not yet relinquished their monopoly of political authority—women had full suffrage only in New Zealand—or of their domestic authority over the household. It still seemed unthinkable that a woman could ever have the authority to judge the actions of a man; virtually no women served on juries or as judges anywhere. By 1950, white women in the United States faced no impediments to voting but were often still excluded from jury service. In many states, husbands controlled their wives' earnings, and their bodies, too; there was no concept of marital rape. Educational and professional opportunities broadened, but only after nasty struggles, point by point. When men

Linda K. Kerber is the May Brodbeck Professor in the Liberal Arts and Professor of History at the University of Iowa. She is the author of *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies,* published in 1998.

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and women were treated differently—by the law, by schools, by employers—the difference was regularly explained as privilege, as shielding women from the burdens and risks that men shouldered.

If the world of 1950 seems nearly as antique in these respects as that of 1900 or even of 1000, it is in large part due to an extraordinary international political movement that flourished in the United States from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s and has been with us ever since. In 1967, Ruth Rosen was a new graduate student and working journalist at Berkeley. Now, in her forthright popular history, she brings to bear the strategies of the historian and the passion of the participant in order to convey to people in a different time the intensity and importance of what was experienced and accomplished.

In Rosen's telling, young women's energies propelled the movement. Nevertheless, their debt to their mothers' generation was greater than they understood or acknowledged. They were the lucky ones: the harshest of cold war pressures had eased; the civil rights movement had set heroic examples of strategies for social change. In such a climate, the generation of feminists who came of age in the mid-sixties were emboldened to go beyond the reforms of their elders and to name the "hidden injuries of sex." As they saw it, difference was not privilege but sexual politics. It masked unfairness ("protecting" women from "hard" work often involved consigning them to ill-paying work), and it was characterized by a scorn that undermined any progress toward real equality.

As feminists developed their agendas, respect for the safety and integrity of women's bodies emerged as a top priority across the spectrum. Feminists shook up personnel practices by challenging the "commonsense" argument that women were unreliable employees because they were likely to get married and then get pregnant and take maternity leave. They transformed the doctor-patient relationship throughout the nation by insisting on informed engagement with choices of treatment; they renamed rape as a crime of violence rather than of sexual need; they named sexual harassment as an expression of power and intimidation, not charm and affection; they named domestic violence as a matter of public safety. And—though, oddly enough, Rosen spends little time discussing their most familiar triumph—feminists championed access to birth control and the legalization of abortion.

It is a mark of how close to the quick they cut that feminists quickly made enemies. Successes, notably their case for legalized abortion, evoked, as in mirror image, opposition—in Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, in Stop ERA, and in many other forceful groups. Meanwhile, it became increasingly difficult to agree on priorities for the next agenda as the movement expanded and became more diffuse. Rosen blames the media for making things worse by producing "stereotypes of feminists," notably the "selfish 'superwoman'" who became "both a symbol and a scapegoat for other intractable problems and irreversible changes in American society."

These demoralizations are where the story of the feminism of the 1970s often stops. But it is becoming evident—and Rosen's vivid overview helps clarify this—that women's liberation did more than push old liberals in a progressive direction. Its insistence on the centrality of sex to the definition of inequality built on a way of thinking about gender and politics that had been largely dormant since the days of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. It split open the familiar world by offering another, simultaneous reality in which politics, language, marriage, religion, economics—all sorts of categories that were usually treated as independent of each other—were linked in a social system that empowered men and weakened women. To the question, for example, "Why has it been so hard to reach goals that seem comfortably within the liberal-democratic tradition, like equal pay for equal work?" could be offered a simple yet provocative response: in some deep, not well-articulated way, Americans have long "known"—from the weakness of rape law, from silence about domestic violence—that women's bodies have been legally accessible to men. If women are available to men, men and women cannot be equal, and so the principle of equal pay for equal work is not self-evident.

Susan Gubar figures briefly in Rosen's pages as the co-author, with Sandra Gilbert, of the pathbreaking 1979 book, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination,* part of what Rosen calls the "revolution in knowledge" by which feminist scholars transformed institutions of

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higher learning between 1970 and 1990. The essays collected in her newest work, written for different occasions and in different voices, map the landscape of a particular literary critic—Jewish, feminist, deeply engaged—while examining the present condition of the critical theory that backed up the revolution Rosen chronicles.

In the end, Gubar's assessment of the movement has much in common with Rosen's, although Gubar is not as explicit: feminism's great intellectual accomplishment, the "splitting of gender from biological sexuality," has made it possible to ask radically new questions. From a scrutiny of the female body in a male world, feminist theory proceeded to consider ever more finely tuned questions of physical identity, and ethnic and sexual minority groups made vital contributions to the dialogue. Gubar's own anxieties, offered in the conversational voice of the memoirist, are grounded in a sense of her bodily self as stranger—in a professional world ordered by men, as well as in a community of faith that constructs its central concepts (Torah, God) from male perspectives.

Twenty years after the publication of *The Madwoman in the Attic,* however, Gubar is troubled by the very abstractions she once found vital and invigorating. She sees "cultural amnesia and divisiveness," she worries about the "internal ailments" of feminist criticism, and she complains about "calcified" academic language. She is distressed by the divisiveness she finds in academic meetings. She remains wistful for the first-person plural; where is the *we* that once bound feminist critics together?

Nevertheless, as Gubar narrates struggles among feminist theorists in the 1990s—and dishes out some calcified prose of her own in the process—it is possible for this reader, at least, to understand what she calls the "recondite abstractions [that] characterize postmodernist feminist theory" less as abstractions for their own sake than as efforts to name complexities of gender construction. These efforts give the concrete achievements of the 1970s movement a more nuanced language and a richer theoretical underpinning. Facing the future, Gubar turns optimist: she makes claims for the "consequential scholarship" feminists have produced, and she ends with a call to "engage our bold critical history . . . [in] its sense of compelling urgency and irreverent vitality."

Thus both books end on a note of optimism. The most powerful pages in *The World Split Open* come at the end, when Rosen dismisses the backlash, invokes some of the great rhetoric of women activists of the nineteenth century, and makes eloquent claims for the continuing power of feminist analysis and the accomplishments of feminist energies. The year 2000 is different from the year 1900; the agenda of international feminism now has the words to define as unfairness disparities in access to citizenship, education, and professions, and to define as crimes what had once been viewed as customs.

But being able to conceptualize new harms is not the same thing as eliminating them. That we have revised the rules of evidence in rape law and named sexual harassment and domestic violence does not mean that the behaviors have diminished. The extraordinary expansion of educational and professional opportunities for women has been accompanied by the feminization of poverty. Out of their own bitter experience, women of color and lesbians have analyzed the ways in which systems of racial, sexual, and class hierarchy are linked; but analysis is not magical transformation. The great work of feminism—philosophical, scholarly, and activist—is to claim women's intellectual and bodily integrity for both the national and the international human-rights agenda. This great work will surely consume another century's worth of energy.

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Warring with Time

MARCEL PROUST: A LIFE
By William C. Carter. Yale University Press. $35.

Reviewed by AARON MATZ

The most wicked pleasure that biography can provide is the threat of its subject's failure. Somewhere between the sepia image of birth and the final tableau of the deathbed, a gifted biographer must throw a series of obstacles, false starts, and culs-de-sac in his hero's way. The effect is like a suspense movie: we know the correct ending; we are always many steps ahead of the protagonist; and we want to scream at him not to go astray. In this respect, few writers are better suited to biography than Marcel Proust. Would he have triumphed if he had continued shaping his novel in the form of a cumbersome aesthetic tract? What if he had succumbed to pneumonia before his manuscripts were mostly complete? Would we still consider Proust's masterwork the greatest novel of the twentieth century if he had called it, as he once planned to, *In Front of a Few Stalactites of the Past*?

Proust was always engaged in some war against time—first, as a procrastinator, he tried to put his novel off; then, after he discovered his true vocation, he grew sicker and sicker, and his struggle became one against illness and the ravages of age. This complementary flight from and pursuit of time would become the central theme of his novel. Proust's "loss" has little to do with a distant, pretty past that he hopes to remember. *In Search of Lost Time* mourns—and seeks to regain through writing—the time that is escaped, wasted, and misspent in any life.

At first glance Proust appears to invite biography more than most writers. His novel itself seems intensely autobiographical; it is often read as an elaborate roman à clef. This might explain the eruption of strange, personal books on Proust during the last five years. From *How Proust Can Change Your Life,* Alain de Botton's celebration of the wisdom of Proust in the guise of a self-help manual, to *The Year of Reading Proust,* Phyllis Rose's memoir (from which Proust is virtually absent), readers have been unable to ignore the French novelist—or at least his aura—but have seemed unsure in which genre or mode to discuss him. Even Malcolm Bowie's fine work of criticism, *Proust Among the Stars,* flirts with travelogue and astronomy before buckling down to more conventional literary interpretation.

And then there are the biographies. George Painter's once-definitive 1959 study has grown dated, so others have sprouted forth to replace it. Jean-Yves Tadié's excellent *Marcel Proust* was published in France four years ago; an English translation is due later this year. Last year came Edmund White's account of Proust's life, heavily emphasizing the novelist's homosexuality and noteworthy for at least one unique achievement: it may be the only book on Proust shorter than 150 pages.

William C. Carter's life of Proust is anything but concise. Taking advantage of letters and manuscripts not available in Painter's time, he has forged an exhaustive biography of more than eight hundred pages of narrative, followed by more than a hundred pages of notes. If the story he tells sounds familiar, it's because Proust's life, like his genius, has passed into the realm of mythology. Few writers have accumulated such a thick patina of legend and hagiography around their work or persona.

We first meet the parents, the successful doctor Adrien Proust and his Jewish wife, Jeanne Weil. When Marcel is born he appears "so weak that the family feared it would die." (Illness is a leitmotif in any Proust biography.) We read about the boy's devotion to his mother, his obsessive teenage onanism, and his undying need to be loved by all his classmates and friends. Even at a young age, Proust is "bewitched by society." Through the mothers of his classmates, Proust gains access to Parisian salons and learns to master their rituals of flattery and extravagance. (He spends, for example, an obscene amount of money on flowers.) The young Proust is quite adept at socializing, but he cannot hide his essential immaturity. He is delicate, intensely jealous of everyone, and nervous to the point of paralysis. When his father gives the seventeen-year-old Proust ten francs for the local brothel, Marcel is so terrified that he breaks the prostitute's cham-

Aaron Matz frequently reviews books for *The New York Observer.*

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Advertisement

WITHOUT SCIENCE, RELIGION REVERTS TO SUPERSTITION

So taught the Hellenistic philosophy of Epicurus. He believed that truly useful religion—contributing peace of mind—comes by imagining deity as tranquil and not meddlesome in human affairs. Such deity cannot be imagined, however, unless one knows the limits of what is possible and what impossible, which can be learned only through the empirical study of nature.

Of all ancient philosophies Epicureanism is most comparable to modern physics and biology; for it, reality is that the essence of matter is atomic, and of living things, indeterministic and evolutionary—no Creator, no Providence in its worldview. Idealists (Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, Judaists)—who regard matter and life as initiated and governed by divine Intelligence—scorned such impious doctrine; scorned, too, Epicureans' ascribing laws and virtues to human rather than divine will. Epicureans said that primitive men initiated ethics when neighbors made compacts not to harm one another in person or property. This led to the precept that deceit must be avoided. Idealists held no such scruples; deception in the form of myth, poetry, and rhetoric served them as means to inculcate loyalty to deity, family, ruler, and to glorify pain as an aspect of such loyalty. Epicureans taught that by nature man avoids pain and seeks pleasure. Hence, idealists despised Epicureans as pleasuremongers and as threats to social order. Rabbis used "Epicurus!" as a curse word. Justin Martyr, an idealistic philosopher who became a Christian, thought that God used Plato, Stoics, poets, and historians—whatever they rightly said belonged to Christians too. But he excluded and condemned Epicureans.

Since Christianity was a blend of idealisms, one would think its founder, Jesus, rejected Epicureanism. Not so. According to Jack Hannah the biggest error perpetrated by well-intentioned, idealistically minded persons is the depiction of Jesus as an idealist. Ironically, it was an Epicurean spirit of critical scrutiny, reborn in the Enlightenment, that exposed the use of myth and rhetoric by the Evangelists in fabricating narratives about Jesus—their deceits so pervasive that attempts by various scholars to extract the historical Jesus from their Gospels yield Jesus as peasant revolutionary, Essene messianist, charlatan magician, Jewish Cynic . . . yet always as idealist, which Hannah says is historically questionable. Historicity can never be approached using the four Gospels of the New Testament as principal source.

Hannah has detected that a recently unearthed collection of 113 sayings of Jesus (the so called *Gospel of Thomas*) is a record that escaped alteration by writers under the influence of the four canonical Gospels; its sayings show them prior to rather than dependent on comparable canonical sayings. Their sequence corresponds chronologically to the *Gospel of Mark*'s course of events. This corroborates the claim made in the incipit to the *Gospel of Thomas* that its contents are remarks that puzzled Thomas, one of Jesus' students, who wrote them down. As student notes, taken at the time heard, of sayings not well understood, to be studied when there was leisure, the *Gospel of Thomas* affords verbatim data that are likely not contaminated by somebody's point of view. And since these notes are chronologically ordered, Hannah couples each with its associated context from Mark to construct a narrative. Given a context, the 113 sayings become more reliably interpretable. This narrative indicates that Jesus was oriented to Epicureanism and was not a believer in Judaism's teachings regarding God, messiahship, prophets, demons, circumcision, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and food regimen. Probably his speaking in enigmatic "sound bites" hid from his disciples his favoring a philosophy that their Jewish religion despised. So what did Jesus think he could accomplish surreptitiously?

Just like Epicureans, Jesus was sensitive to the pain of his fellow man. Just as Epicureans did, Jesus administered maxims as verbal medicine for preventing or healing distress of mind caused by superstitious ideas about gods and death. When his disciples were anxious as to how they should observe certain everyday religious duties, he answered with the saying: "Do not speak a lie, and do not do what you hate." Another of his sayings: "You will not taste death," corresponds to the Epicurean: "Nothing expected in death," which is one of four principal "verbal medicines" that was administered to protect mental health. The difference in the way it is phrased suggests that, though Jesus mainly addressed Jews, he as well corrected Epicurean belief that death means annihilation. Hannah presents a case for Jesus' having transformed the Epicurean explanation of how immortal divine entities come to exist into an explanation of how an immortal entity that continues one's personal consciousness can emerge from material bodies.

You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism by Jack Hannah
ISBN 0-9670053-0-2. 321 pages, paperback, $12 postpaid. Order with check from
FRANK PUBLISHING, 1816 Springmill Road, Mansfield, OH 44903-8907

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berpot and flees the brothel in embarrassment. He then writes to his grandfather for ten more francs, reasoning, "It can't happen twice in one lifetime that a person's too upset to screw."

But Proust's childhood never exactly ends. There is no first job, no definitive move away from home, no marriage that might neatly signal the beginning of an adult life. Marcel is an avid reader from a young age, as we would expect from the novelist who begins *Swann's Way* with his narrator falling asleep while immersed in a book. But the path from reader to writer is not yet clear to the young Proust. Would he always write fluffy society pieces for newspapers? Should he devote himself to art criticism or become a playwright?

Carter deftly fuses Proust's increasingly hermetic private life with the growing turbulence of French society around him. Carter is particularly shrewd discussing the 1890s, a decade crucial to Proust's eventual novel. He takes two major events—the scandal and trial of Oscar Wilde and the Dreyfus Affair—and explores their influence on Proust, then in his twenties. Proust did not race to the barricades in either case, but both controversies affected him profoundly. In the middle volumes of his novel, especially *Sodom and Gomorrah,* the themes of homosexuality and anti-Semitism would commingle and come to the fore.

Like all Proust biographers, Carter takes pleasure in identifying the many real-life figures that inspired the characters in *In Search of Lost Time.* A mistress of Proust's father would become Odette de Crécy; the Jewish art connoisseur Charles Ephrussi is transformed into the Jewish art connoisseur Charles Swann; Saint-Loup is a hybrid of one of Proust's friends and an officer he met during his brief military service; Baron de Charlus was modeled after the aristocrat Robert de Montesquiou; and Alfred Agostinelli, the daredevil pilot who infatuated Proust, became a woman in the novel: the narrator's great obsession, Albertine.

This tendency to find parallels between the life and the work is natural. But with Proust it is also particularly dangerous. For all the personal and autobiographical detail of *In Search of Lost Time,* Proust also wrote the long essay "Against Sainte-Beuve," in which he attacked the influential nineteenth-century critic for confusing the personal and the fictional. "Against Sainte-Beuve" argues that anecdotal material should not cloud our understanding of literature: "A book is the product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices." While Carter devotes a chapter to this important early work, he neglects to reconcile his own project with Proust's profound distrust of biography itself, even though he constantly weaves passages from the *Search* into the biographical narrative.

This flaw fortunately does not derail the great force and momentum of Carter's book. After years of wasted time and wrong turns, after countless society balls and aborted projects, Proust published, in 1913, the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time.* From that moment, his mission was not a quest backward into the past but rather a race against time. The last nine years of his life were devoted to the astounding production of six further volumes, constituting in Carter's words "the most remarkable example of a sustained narrative in the history of literature." When he was nearly finished, Proust died.

A clock ticks incessantly and anxiously throughout the second half of the biography. Will Proust finish his work in time? Carter's book begins to read like a true suspense novel. There are distractions: illness, but also war, love, and frustrating conflicts with his publishers. The large cast of characters in Proust's life become various agents, friends, and villains. There's Gaston Gallimard, the legendary publisher who both encourages and frustrates Proust with his shifting allegiances; André Gide, the established novelist who first (and famously) dismisses Proust, then recognizes his genius and becomes a confidant; and Walter Berry, the close American friend who never doubts Proust's talent.

In the Proust mania currently sweeping literary studies, writers too often ignore the anxiety underlying his achievement. Carter does not belabor this theme—his biography sticks to the facts—but he never falls prey to the classic and clichéd misconception of Proust as the charming dandy trying to remember things past. Time was never a gentle friend for Proust. At first a hulking mass of deferrals and red herrings, it became a destructive force speeding him toward death. But before time finally caught up with him, the writer refashioned the nemesis of his life into the theme of his fearless novel. It was Proust who had the last word.

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THE READER REPLIES

OUT OF JOINT

I am astonished at your decision, revealed in the Winter issue's "Letter From the Editor," to greet the year 2000 as the start of the twenty-first century. Surely all of your readers are savvy and literate enough to know that January 1, 2001, is the beginning of the third millennium. The facts concerning the development of the current calendar (most especially that there was no year zero when the sequencing from B.C. to A.D. was defined in the mid-500s) are beyond question or debate.

As a marketer, I understood why businesses of all kinds used the odometer shift from 1999 to 2000 as a promotional come-on, but THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR? I've never seen a retraction within your pages, but time is not running out. Yet.

DONALD D. O'BRIEN
Sterling, Virginia

MAIL

Thank you for Philonoë's wonderful essay on mail. I am a lifelong letter writer, but have succumbed to the use of the word processor and e-mail. However, I must admit that the ability to reach friends and family quickly with e-mail has been a very nice addition to my life. Being of an age where I always write in complete sentences that are usually grammatically correct, I have endured shortcuts, strange symbols, poor spelling, and worse grammar. These are all acceptable when the end result is a grandchild pouring his heart out to you.

TAMARA G. SELDEN
Easton, Pennsylvania

Like Philonoë, I looked askance at e-mail, just as I used to look askance at the typewritten instead of the handwritten letter, and have arrived at a similar accommodation. E-mail encourages letter writing and debases it at the same time. While frowning on the use of emoticons and acronyms, I keep in mind that many letter writers of old often used accepted abbreviations in their handwritten missives.

Adam Gopnik, whom Philonoë quoted, is mistaken. Nobody will be reading our e-mail in two hundred years' time, for it is a volatile medium. Even if it hasn't evaporated, the data standards will be different enough to make it impossible to read: just try opening a Microsoft Word 1.0 document using the latest version. It cannot be done. I save all e-mail that is not junk mail—along with files of old letters—to PDF (Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format), and store them on CD-ROM disks. Optical media are more reliable than magnetic, and PDF is an open standard.

ANDREW DONOVAN-SHEAD
Tulsa, Oklahoma

This is my letter to the world,
That sends junk mail to me,—
Along with bills, tax statements,
An occasional charity plea.

I don't get any e-mail,
I've never had a fax;
Nor ever heard a voice mail,
Asking to call it back.

Still, keep the junk mail coming,
Oh, Postman—I expect—
Though you stuff my box with bulk rate,
You'll bring one day,—a check!

(With apologies to Emily Dickinson.)

ROY E. GRIDLEY
Lawrence, Kansas

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MY SUPERMARKET

The last time I laughed so maniacally was over Steve Martin's prescription label warnings in *The New Yorker.* Wonderful wonderful wonderful. Tim Morris was describing Heinen's Supermarket in Aurora, Ohio. Or the Aldi in Blankenese, outside Hamburg, Germany. If you ever go to a weekly format, keep him on!

DAVID ANDERSON
Hiram, Ohio

I especially laughed in the paragraph following "16 pages of shocking photos inside." No, you don't find any Woolf or Proust in the supermarket—I'm ashamed to admit how much pulp I have read.

TOM HULL
Myrtle Creek, Oregon

It was that checker holding an artichoke "at arm's length as if it might go off" that did it. I laughed, I spluttered, I broke the peace of my husband's evening meal. Thank you for making me completely happy.

BARBARA WHITESIDES
Newton, Massachusetts

Morris has an incredible ability to express ideas and insights that most people would be unable to capture so eloquently. I went back and read his essay on jigsaw puzzles ("Puzzlement," Autumn 1998) and enjoyed it very much as well. I am a recent Stanford graduate and an avid reader of the SCHOLAR; among all the talented people who get published in your pages, I would rate Morris as the best.

NOEL PRICE
Fresno, California

Though I enjoyed Tim Morris's fine essay, I am afraid that a flaw in his mathematical reasoning is leading him to waste (small amounts of) his money. If double-cents-off coupons existed in such abundance that, each time Morris used one to buy a product, he could be fairly sure of having another in hand before it was time to replenish his supply, Morris's assumption would be correct: he would indeed, paradoxically, save money buying the smaller, "less economical"10-ounce size for $1.00. However, if the double-cents-off coupons are rare, then Morris would be better off buying the 15-ounce economy size for $1.20. What his analysis failed to take into account is that, having passed up the 15-ounce product in favor of the 10-ounce size, he will have to restock sooner and probably won't have another double-cents-off coupon when he does. In that case he'd have done better to buy the larger size.

Some what-if questions might illuminate the problem without need for calculations. Start from the realistic scenario in which Morris twice a year receives a double-cents-off coupon. Each is worth 90 cents toward the purchase of shampoo. Also assume that Morris goes through 15 ounces of the shampoo in a couple of months. What if, instead of sending him a double-cents-off coupon twice a year, the shampoo company simply sends him 90 cents on the same schedule, on condition that he buy shampoo at least twice a year? Now what if the company dispenses with the contract, trusting in his buying habits? And now what if the sender of the no-strings-attached annual gift of $1.80 is not a shampoo company but a stingy uncle? Surely in this last case, there's no reason why the uncle's bequest should alter Morris's shampoo-buying habits. These last scenarios, though far-fetched, are mathematically equivalent to the first one, and help explain what is going on.

I hope William Bennett would give Morris a high passing grade for mathematical literacy; I know I would. It's important to make as few mistakes as possible, but the more important skill is to explain ideas clearly, as Morris does. Lucid reasoning, even when flawed, has the virtue that it can be test-marketed in that indispensable emporium, the supermarket of ideas.

JAMES PROPP
Department of Mathematics
University of Wisconsin, Madison

MORALITY PLAYS

Andrew Stark's "Morality Plays" illustrates what happens to a potentially interesting and important topic in the hands of an author who lacks historical perspective, economic analysis, and a winning way with words. Much of the essay concerns wealth and virtue, but these concepts are inadequately identified. To make matters worse, Stark inhabits a Gilbert

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and Sullivan world where each of his intellectual protagonists is either a little liberal or else a little conservative. (Rush Limbaugh does this too.)

An essential concern in assessing American society is "compared to what?" Hundreds of thousands of immigrants pour in from all over the world, ready to cope with our supposed racism and injustice; millions more would come if they could. The last century has given us a mountain of evidence of what works and what doesn't in economic policies related to productivity and fairness. We will be better served by studies of that evidence, and not by the semantic scholasticism Stark has offered.

PAUL B. TRESCOTT
Southern Illinois University

Andrew Stark replies: Trescott believes it's possible to know "what works and what doesn't in economic policies related to productivity and fairness." I envy his tidy mind, where everything is neatly shelved. Meanwhile, out in the real world of contemporary political discourse, people who (as my article amply demonstrates) identify themselves as "liberals" or "conservatives" continue to differ deeply over such issues. My purpose was to explore the structure of their arguments and—far from showing them to be "Gilbert and Sullivan" cartoons—expose the ambiguities and tensions that bedevil both sides.

ON NOT SEEING VENICE

Duncan Fallowell writes in his very first line, "I have never been to Venice and have no wish to go." He then pontificates about why Venice is a worthless city. In my experience, only charlatans or uneducated people attempt to speak authoritatively about things they have no knowledge of. As an English teacher, if I were to assert that I would never read Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," for example, because everyone I knew had hated it, I would be doing a disservice to myself and to my students.

CHRISTIAN TALBOT
New York, New York

Duncan Fallowell replies: Must one commit murder in order to disapprove of it?

OF BOOKS AND TROWELS

Though I was pleased by the heavyweights fronting the Winter issue—Jacques Barzun's elegant extract, Vladimir Nabokov's lepidoptera, etc.—my favorite pieces were Roger Jones's bookselling journal (what an amiable gent he sounds; he made me laugh) and Wendy Lesser's reconsideration, garden trowel in hand, of Pope and Wordsworth. *She* made me cry. There, I admitted it—recollected in *un*tranquillity. Thanks for the tears.

Also, cheers for the general handsomeness of the journal's design.

WARREN KEITH WRIGHT
Arbyrd, Missouri

A POET PARSED

In her review of William Gass's *Reading Rilke* (Winter 2000) Susan Miron writes that Rilke's great elegies announced themselves to him "as he walked along the windswept edge of the Duino Castle cliffs in Switzerland." She confuses Castle Duino, located on the Adriatic coast near Trieste, where Rilke wrote the first two elegies in 1911–12, with his "tower" at Muzot in southern Switzerland, some three hundred miles to the west, where he completed the elegies ten years later and also wrote his "Sonnets to Orpheus."

THEODORE ZIOLKOWSKI
Class of 1900 Professor of German and Comparative Literature
Princeton University

Susan Miron replies: Professor Ziolkowski—the author of *The View from the Tower*, reviewed in the SCHOLAR's Spring 1999 issue—is of course correct. I apologize for this sin of conflation from the depths of my humbled, geographically challenged soul.

Please send letters to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036; fax them to 202-265-0083; or e-mail them to* scholar@pbk.org. *Letters may be edited for length or clarity.*

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The Podium

Ultimately Inexplicable

SHIRLEY HAZZARD

Graham Greene was born in England in 1904. He died in Switzerland in 1991. At his death, there was scarcely anyone in the English-reading world unaware of his literary and strangely personal yet private presence. He was one of those autonomous, prolific figures that our world no longer produces—articulate yet enigmatic, amusing and amused, often generous, often angry, endlessly interesting and curious, and endlessly unreasonable: an intensely imaginative and literary man seized with a passion, and a great memory, for English literature. Reading and writing had been his lifeline since childhood. Born into a large, complicated, well-to-do, well-educated family, he had sought privacy from the first. Like many creative talents, he had been an apt pupil of that great instructor of imaginative life, loneliness. The violation of his inward, singular existence, when he was flung into the crowded and cruel world of boarding school, haunted and to some degree shaped the adult writer.

As writer and man, Graham lived a long, impassioned, dangerous life, much marked by unhappiness that was sometimes of his own choosing. Like other strong, solitary figures of his time, he did not need happiness; he did not need to be liked or relied on. He needed and desired love, the love of women; and that desire was, I think, together with his work, and with an unappeasable restlessness, the ruling preoccupation of his grown life.

I knew, and saw, Graham over many years. These are my impressions. I do not try to "explain" him. He was ultimately inexplicable—and in any case I feel that the contemporary consciousness is drowning in explanations: explanation is becoming a substitute for experience. Graham's existence was fraught with experience. When it did not present itself, he would provoke it. His thought was swift, acute; his intuition preternatural. His intellect was speculative rather than contemplative. I never knew a man who had less of the philosopher.

—From a talk given at the New York Public Library, March 1, 2000

Shirley Hazzard, novelist, short-story writer, and critic, is the author of *Greene on Capri: A Memoir*, published in February by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

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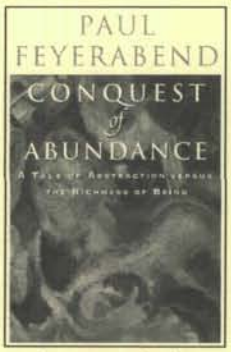
New from Chicago

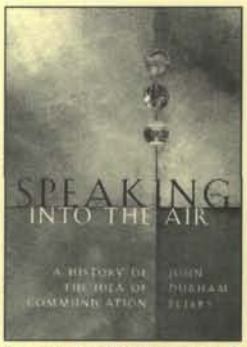
Conquest of Abundance



A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being
Paul Feyerabend
Edited by Bert Terpstra

"This posthumous work . . . attempts to understand how the scientific worldview gained its foothold and at what cost to experiential richness. . . . The result is a first-rate and consistently pleasurable meditation on epistemology."
—*Publishers Weekly*
Cloth $27.00

Speaking into the Air



A History of the Idea of Communication
John Durham Peters

"Guaranteed to alter your thinking about communication. Peters begins this delightful essay by observing that 'Only moderns could be facing each other and be worried about "communicating" as if they were thousands of miles apart.' . . . Original, erudite, and beautifully written, this book is a gem."—*Kirkus Reviews*
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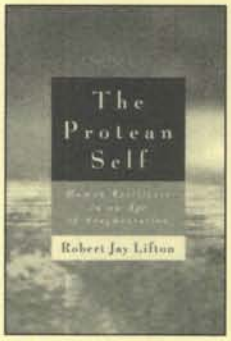
Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend
Edited and with an Introduction by Matteo Motterlini

"The writings in this volume are of considerable intellectual importance, and will be of great interest to anyone concerned with the development of the philosophical views of Lakatos and Feyerabend, or indeed with the development of philosophy of science in general during this crucial period."—Donald Gillies, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* (on the Italian edition)
Cloth $34.00

The Protean Self



Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation
Robert Jay Lifton

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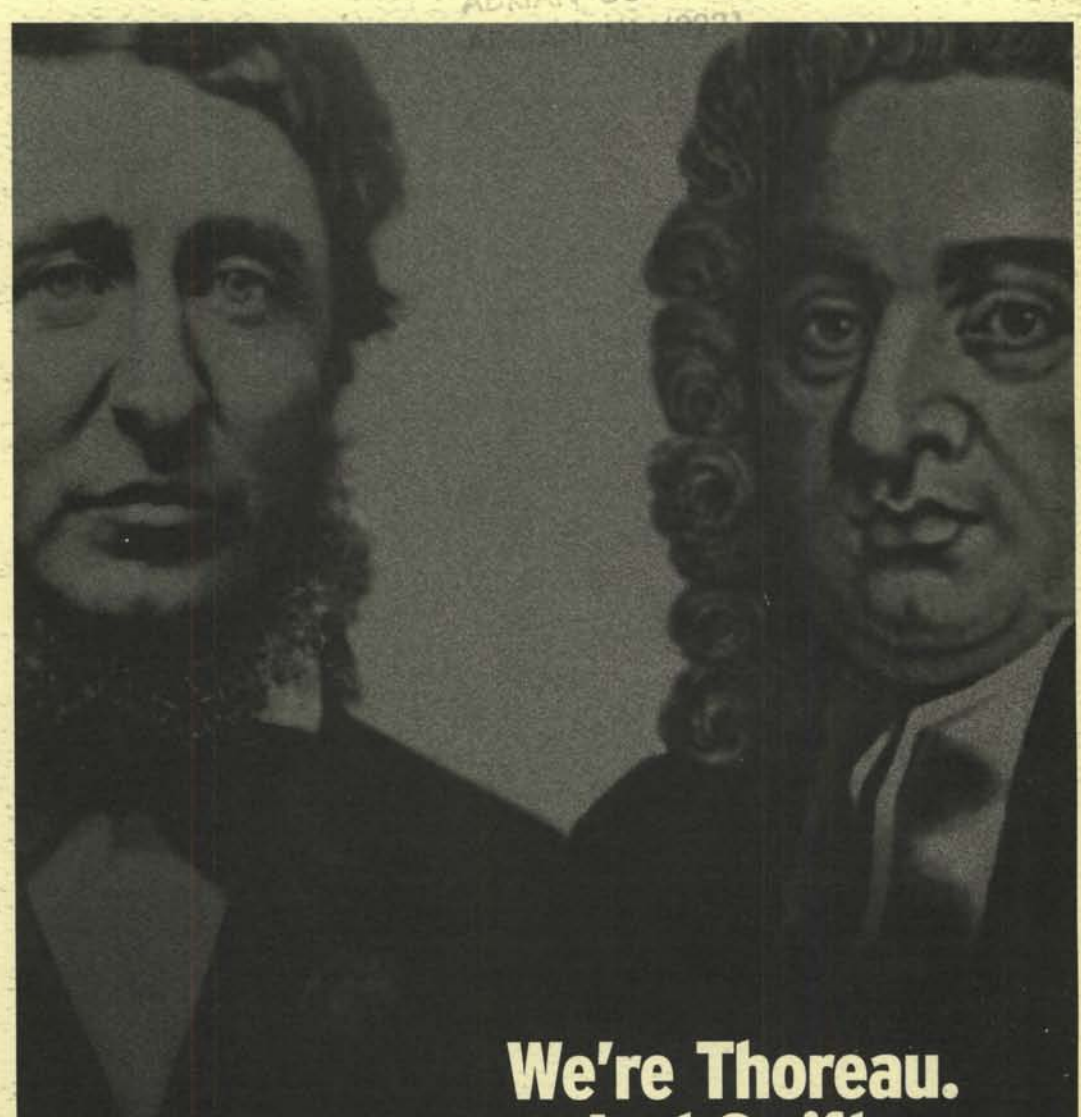

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